

# SETTLING IN

## WE LIVE IN THE COUNTRY

When we came to Dagenham we had fields and plenty of fresh air. Most of the fields round the yard were pea fields, cabbage fields and all that. When the word got round that it was being bought up by the council for building, we were allowed to go and take what was there. I'd get the pram out and load it up with cabbages. My mum would say, "Go and fetch us some rhubarb or peas."

There was an orchard on the other side of the railway and I can remember getting the pears. Me and Emmy, my sister, would listen for the train, "No trains coming." We'd cross over and climb up, get those pears and take them home.

There was a little stream near us and we used to dam it up with mud and bricks, anything we could find. It got deeper on one side so that we could paddle. It was lovely then. We used to get some sausages and potatoes off my mum and we went over to where the trees were. Emmy and I used to build a little fire, put our potatoes in and cook the sausages on a fork. We used to smoke the sausages dirty but we enjoyed them.

*Florence Essam (Becontree)*



*Dagenham Road, Becontree.  
Site of 'Farnham Tavern', 1930s*

## DOWN ON THE FARM

We moved to a house opposite a farm and the farmyard went straight across the road, as a matter

of fact you could just step over a ditch and be in the cabbages. Compared to the closeness of the East End, it was country you know, the spaciousness of Downham, it was absolutely beautiful.

*Ron Chattlington (Downham)*



*Ivy Woollett's mother and father, Roehampton*

## SHOWING OFF

When I was about twelve, another girl and I rode our bicycles all the way back to our friends in Westminster, just to show off that we lived in the country. We tried to put on country accents and pretended that we lived near a farm and had to go to school across a railway line. Mind you, we didn't tell them that the school was only across the building line. And do you know our friends were open-mouthed listening to us. Looking back on it, it was so silly but you know kids.

*VI (St Heller)*



*Block 433 Muchelney Road, St Helier, 1931*

### NEW NEIGHBOURS

When you get in the country it's different. I mean the people, they're complete strangers to you, you don't know where they're from and they're just as suspicious of you as you are of them. It takes quite a long time to break down the reserve of some people. Some people can mix easily, others can't.

*Mr Brooke (Becontree)*

People came from different places and parts of the country, and they were all a different class of person. You'd get some from a rough neighbourhood and some from a decent neighbourhood.

*Stanley Breeze (Castelnau)*

When the people and their children moved on to the estate they were virtually in the same age

group. They were all young and just starting with their families. As far as I know the whole population lived in harmony. We had all sorts, butchers, bakers, candlestick makers.

*Ken Willis (Castelnau)*

I've always been a self-sufficient person. When we moved to St Helier I didn't really miss my mother because I think with having the children and my own home it made a difference. My mother lived in Deptford and she came to see us a couple of times and just once in a while, we used to go down by tube and see her. The tube was very useful because I could connect at the Oval and get a bus through to Deptford.

We got friendly with our neighbours very quickly indeed. As it was a new estate most of them had only been there three years when we moved. They told us where the shops were and everything else about the estate.

*Hetty Gates (St Helier)*



*Eaton Gardens, Becontree 1927. Typical banjo road layout on garden city lines*

### HE'S A DECENT BLOKE

Well, I think the friendliness amongst the people in Dagenham was because they were all working class people. They all had to do manual work for their wages. They all realised that they could all have the same kind of trouble come to them. They just looked at the chap next door and they said, "Well, he's a decent bloke, he works hard. He goes out early in the morning, comes home late at night." Because we were all in the same class, you got that friendliness.

*Anonymous (Becontree)*

## BACK TO THE OLD HAUNTS

There were quite a few families that came on the estate that never settled and they agitated to go back. They went back to their old haunts, they just couldn't stand it. They much preferred to live in Dockhead or some place like that, rather than live here, in Downham, in a semi-rural area.

*John Edwin Smith (Downham)*

I was thirteen when we moved from the East End of London down to Dagenham, which was really the country. In fact my mother said to me, "We're going to the country," and I was not delighted. I just couldn't settle once we moved. I was always going back to the East End once I started work at fourteen and had a bit of money. I was going back to all the old haunts and all my old friends and that carried on for years. I just couldn't tolerate Dagenham. There was nothing here. Nice and open, but I just couldn't stand it.

*George Herbert (Becontree)*

I missed the East End when I first came here. I didn't have my mum to help me and it was a terrible, terrible wrench. My eldest boy was about seven, oh, he cried his eyes out. Oh, I can see him now. He sat on the back step of the new house and said, "Oh take me back, take me back, don't let me stop here!"

My husband never stopped down here at first. He'd do his work, come home, have his tea and go back up to London. My mother still lived there and I used to go up too.

For about the first six months all I'd do everyday was get my shopping, and get my dinner, and then sit in the park. I wasn't happy but of course I had to get used to it. It took me about four months to settle down and my husband stopped going to London after a while.

*Amella Cogley (Becontree)*

I remember we didn't feel that we fitted in with the community, people weren't friendly, not like today. We didn't really have neighbours because Mum had her own gateway. We had the school next door and there wasn't anybody near us, not like being under a porch, which is more neighbourly.

*Daphne Maynard (Castelnau)*

## LIVING ON A BUILDING SITE

Almost everyone in the houses had moved, on our estate, during the summer holidays of 1934. We knew nobody, not a soul and the building of the estate went on all around us. During the day there was a great deal of noise, dust and activity. Nobody was happy because there was so much noise all the time. The builders had these big chain saws and diesel engines. They roared away all the time cutting down trees, digging up roots and gouging

out holes all around us. Even though we kept the windows closed, the dust got inside the house and covered all the furniture, and all the women complained bitterly about their clean washing on the lines being covered with smuts.

When we went out we had to pick our way over rutted earth and piles of mud and, when it rained, everywhere was a sea of mud. It was impossible to go out without wellington boots, and we hadn't got any. And I remember the builders put down planks for us to walk on.

During this summer, my sister and I had almost unlimited freedom. We roamed the fields and lanes as we liked, provided we kept together. We had strict instructions not to talk to any of the workmen or to go into any house, finished or not, in case something terrible happened to us. What that 'something' was we were never told, but we didn't dare disobey Mum's instructions. That whole summer spent in the open air did wonders for my health and my parents were glad that they had moved out of London, even though it meant having to leave family and friends behind.

*Dorothy Barton (St Heller)*

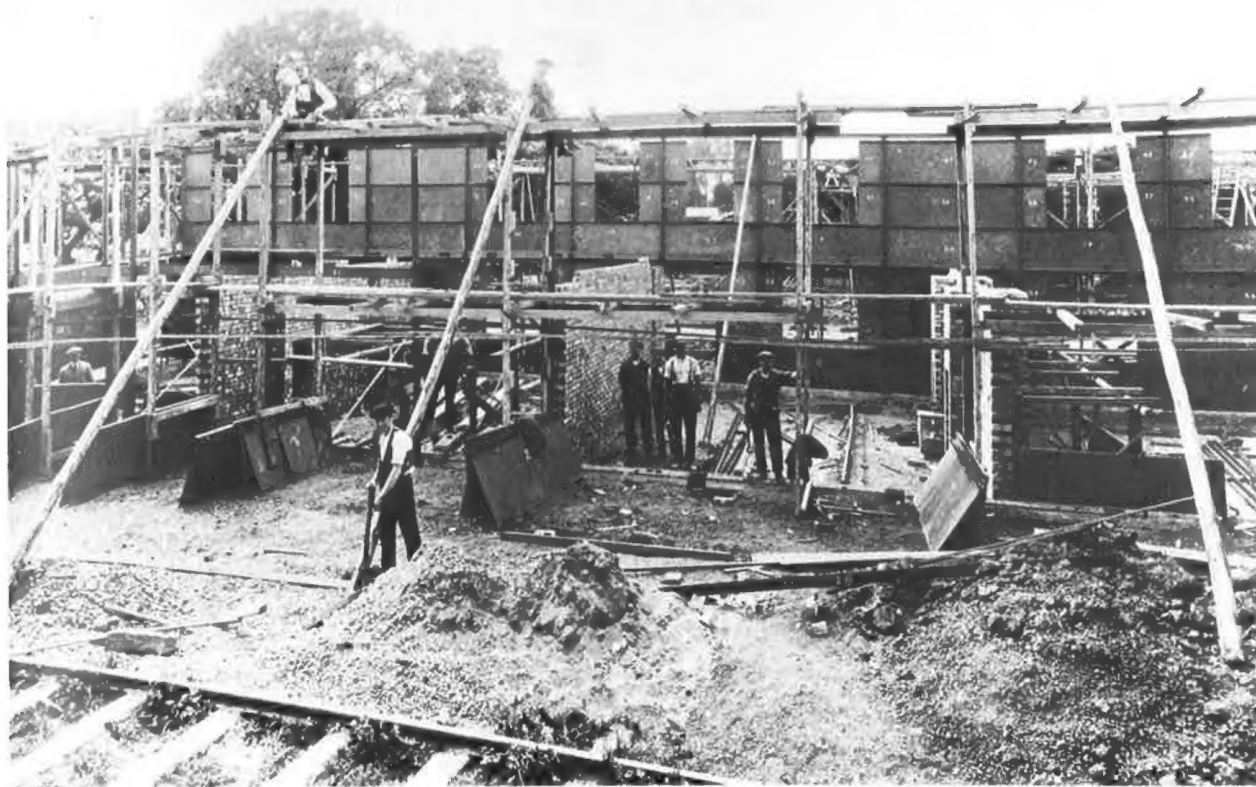
## GETTING INTO MISCHIEF

When we moved to the estate in 1922, Dover House Road was just gravel with two rows of sleepers laid over the top. Only one side of Elmshaw Road where we lived was built and opposite us was all this scaffolding.

On Saturdays when the builders were gone and all their stuff was left out in the open, we kids used to have a whale of a time and race around the estate. Where the foundations of the houses were laid, we used to be soldiers and play 'war' in them. We used to have brick fights and sword fights.

There used to be a watchman, a great big fat bloke and we called him 'Beer Barrel'. I remember there was a tarmac shelter and we used to throw pebbles and handfuls of rubble at him and then make him chase us. Of course he couldn't catch us, he was so fat. We would also climb all over the scaffolding. Then with our bows and arrows, we'd fire at poor old Beer Barrel.

Inside the houses were these fireplaces which had a built-in oven. The builders used to hide their tea and tins of condensed milk in them and we would pinch it and make our own tea. On each corner of a set of buildings, was a lake of limewash and the builders used to put a plank across this lake. Well we used to run across the lake. The last kid running over one day bounced up and down on the plank and of course fell into the lime. We took him home and his mother slung him into a bath of cold water, which was the worst thing she could have done. He came out like a Red Indian!



*Workers erecting steel houses, Watling*

There was a little railway, on a narrow gauge, that ran round the estate and up the Dover House Road. Bits and pieces like bricks and mortar were loaded onto these railway containers and carried round. We used to come down Dover House Road on this railway. Oh, it was great fun until a friend of ours fell off the railway as we were coming down Dover House Road. The wheel of the truck went wrong and she smashed up her arm.

*Jim Evans (Roehampton)*

## BREAKING THE ICE

When we moved to Watling the quietness really disturbed my father because he was used to so much noise. But after a few months we all settled down to the quiet.

Mum didn't settle in so easily as the rest of the family. She was left at home, while Dad was out at work all day, and us children made new friends at school. She loved the outlook and the place but she missed her friends and was very depressed. You see my mother had no family, her mother having died before I was born, so she had to cope with the move on her own.

We'd been on the estate some six weeks before we discussed how we all felt about Burnt Oak, Watling. I remember Mother broke down and ran upstairs crying! Eventually she came back down to say she

was sorry. And my brother said, "Dad said would we like to stay or go back to Kings Cross? We want to stay here." She thought it was horrible of Dad to ask us, and said she would sooner leave as she was missing her friends.

It even got to the stage when Mother wouldn't eat and Dad thought of going back to Kings Cross. I remember when she saw us into bed, she wouldn't sit with Dad and listen to the wireless but go into her room and have a cry.

Father got us a travel pass and we went back to our old neighbourhood for a visit. Mother was in her element. But when we was coming home you could see a great difference in her.

Mother went to this Ladies coffee morning down at the Church Hall. She would come back and say, "Oh, I don't think I like it. The people are not like they were in Kings Cross. I don't like them as much." But she really didn't want to give it a chance, that was the bottom of it. My father had the worst deal of all because he liked it here.

She really didn't get settled until she got friendly with a neighbour who had a mentally handicapped daughter. He was all betwixt and between because his wife was about to go into hospital. Well, Mother offered to help and I remember she cleaned his house and got his evening meals ready. Eventually people came up and said to her, "Oh, that was nice



of you to help out," and all that sort of thing and it broke the ice for her. After that she got friendly with people and no way would she move out of Burnt Oak then.

When you came along the street you'd say, "How do you do?" and all that sort of thing. And I suppose it's because we all wore a scarf and cap, all the same class of people. Some may have earned a pound or two more than others but I don't think anybody thought much about that. They all realised they had little families to keep going and they knew that was a struggle.

*May Millbank (Watling)*

## TOTTERS NEXT DOOR!

The house next door was empty when one day these people turned up with a horse and cart and a few bits of furniture. A parcel had just been delivered to me and while my front door was open this little girl came and stood in front of me. She was wearing a dirty frock and had the dirtiest nose you ever saw. Standing beside her was a woman with a black frock, which was split, so that I could see her underclothes.

"I've come to live with you," the little girl said. "Oh have you, that's nice," I replied, and I thought, "Oh, my God what have we got here? We've got new people next door and they seem a bit funny."

That evening, we were having dinner in the sitting room, when Dad put down his knife and fork and said, "Do you know what we've got? We've got totters living next door!" "What are they?" I asked. "They're rag and bone people and they've come down from London, and they've moved next door."

Well, I soon got talking to them over the back and they hadn't got an idea of anything. They used to hang the washing over the line and it was as black as your hat. My neighbour, she would say to me, "How do you get your sheets white?" "Well I use bleach," I said, which I didn't, but after that her washing improved.

Then I supplied her with some curtains. It was for my own sake as well as hers, because it looked better as you came through the gate. Her little girl said to me, "How do you keep your doorstep clean Mrs Knight?" So I told them about red cardinal and gave her some. I gave them an awful lot of stuff one way and another for their benefit and they really tried to improve.

My neighbour really bucked up her ideas and dressed her kids nice and she would say to them, "Show Mrs Knight how nice you look." And these two girls used to stand there for me to see and I'd say, "You look very nice, now keep yourselves nice and clean. They're a credit to you, Mrs X." Then you'd see those girls at four o'clock and they would be filthy.

One day I asked the little girl where her mum was. "We've had to have the doctor in," she said. "Oh dear, what's the matter with her?" I asked. "I don't know." Well obviously she'd had a miscarriage, so I made her an egg custard and went in to see her.

I remember there was nothing on the stairs, they hadn't got to that stage yet. Upstairs the poor woman was lying in a single bed with hardly any bedclothes on. There was a sack on the floor, which was her mat and a chair on its side, with no back to it. She had a dressing chest with one of these yellowy bluey dishes which you get at fairs on the top, with a bit of fruit in. It was terrible.

I remember when they first moved in, people were horrified to think they were living there, but we got on very well and they were always grateful for what I did for them. I saw my old neighbour the other day and she looked so nice. Everybody's better off now than they've ever been. I'm better off and so is the whole estate. We've developed into a better class of people.

*Elizabeth Knight (Watling)*

## HELP IN TIME OF TROUBLE

If you were in trouble you could always call on anybody. They'd help you when you'd got married, they'd help you give birth and, if you wanted somebody laid out, they'd come.

*Vera Andrews (Downham)*

Before my brother died he was in the hospital for about five days and during that time I went to a friend down the road. His mother gave me my meals and looked after me from morning to night.

There was a double tragedy in one week because three days after my brother died, the little Woodgate girl died. We were real friends with the Woodgates, they only lived five doors away from us. It was a bit of a blow to our avenue and people from up the road came round, and I think it brought us together.

*Donald Breeze (Castelnau)*

We were all the same class, so everyone helped each other. When I was about eight years old, my mother became very ill and it was my friend's fourteen year old sister that came to look after us, making our meals and taking them up to my mother in bed, doing the shopping and taking me to school which was a good three quarters of a mile away. This is how people answered calls for help. On the other hand my mother was always called to diagnose illness, bandaging cut knees, treating sores, getting a bleed from up a nose, and generally comforting anyone in distress. Doctors fees were high and to be avoided if possible. Diphtheria was rife, and my mother was on hand to persuade the parents to get a doctor in. Many children died from this terrible illness.

*Joyce Milan (Page Estate, Eltham)*

'HENDON AND FINCHLEY TIMES.'  
11 NOVEMBER 1927

## THE STRANGLEHOLD ON MILL HILL

Sir,

Isn't it about time that Mill Hill woke up and tried to save itself from being trampled to death. Already the raw, red tentacles of that housing octopus, the London County Council Watling Estate, are pushing their way through green meadows, devouring everything in their path. Helpless residents, apparently mesmerised, sit and do nothing. The value of residential property in the district has already gone down with a slump. Can you wonder? Roads from the estate are drawn straight into the quietude of Mill Hill and Edgware, and the LCC wooden bungalows face houses that sold a few years ago for over £2,000. This surely is a scandal. Have householders no remedy against such a ruinous action by the LCC. Though there is ample room, the smallest cheapest houses are placed cheek by jowl with better type brick houses. Thus the respectable mechanic has to live side by side with people from the slums. Why, too, build the estate so far from London? A man has to pay 23/6d a week rent and 6/-d train fare, and that's the LCC's idea of how to help the working man. Already 100 tenants have received notice to quit, mostly because the rent has not been paid.

House owners find they are having to move, but no

one wants a house in the district now with hordes of ex-slum dwellers on the doorstep, and the threat of a greyhound track to add liveliness. Already there is a need for more police protection. People in Mill Hill have found their gardens ruined by children pulling up rose standards and stripping fruit trees. The language of some of them is such that even a workman on the estate told me last week that he blushed, "To think that such a female could use such a mouthful."

Another menace is that buses are to run from Mill Hill to Burnt Oak Station. This should be stopped at once by residents protesting. The London General Omnibus Company and the tubes have no right to depreciate the value of property in this way in order to swell their own dividends.

What is the future of lovely, how satirical now, Mill Hill? I suppose it will become like the rest of the LCC estate districts, as for instance, the flea bitten Ilford area. But all is not lost. Up Mill Hillians and defend your property!

Yours faithfully, ADSUM.

## THE BATTLE OF VERDUN

The Barnes people thought they were going to have a lot of East Enders and slum clearance people moving onto the Castelnau Estate and they didn't want us here. There was this woman that got a petition up from along Lonsdale Road to stop us coming over. They tried very hard but they failed. They said it was like fighting the battle of Verdun, because Verdun Road, on the edge of the estate, runs off Lonsdale Road, so that lets you know the opposition that was put up and that was for starters.

The local shopkeepers treated us as though they didn't want our business. Now my mother was a woman that stood up for her rights, and fair was fair. Her money was as good as the next person's money. If she went into one of the shops, particularly the greengrocers, she was served badly. If she asked for the same thing as an upper class customer, who had gone before her, they would get what they wanted, but she was then served with an inferior product.

Mind you the community inside the estate was very good. You see, the whole point was, everybody had come fresh over to Castelnau. No two ways about it, it was a lovely place to be. Everyone was young and starting out together and they all helped each other. There really was a lovely atmosphere.

Mabel Wallis (Castelnau)

## COAL IN THE BATH!

The people who lived in the more expensive houses just didn't want to know you. I liked the place but I just didn't like the people. I came from South London and I always find that South Londoners are different to the North London people. I'm not the only one who thought this but I'm talking about the people that lived on the estate, they all seemed a bit rougher.

The estate had an awful name to start with and it took years for it to die down. We'd hear people saying, "Oh yes, you're living on the estate where they put coal in their baths!"

Elizabeth Knight (Watling)

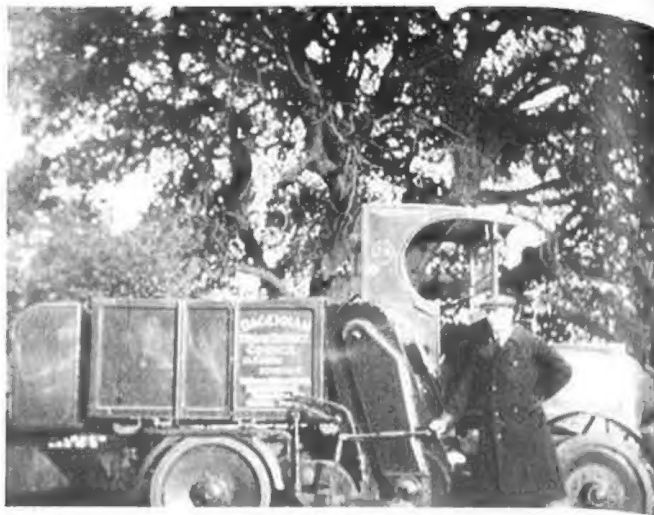
## THE LEPER COLONY

It wasn't long after we'd moved to Mottingham that I found that the local people viewed us with suspicion and a certain amount of contempt for living on a council estate. People would say to me, "Oh, so you're from the estate?" as if you were from a leper colony.

There were a few social clubs and organisations in Chislehurst but young people from the estate were not encouraged to join and on the odd occasion actively discouraged.

I hadn't come across this attitude before because although we'd always been hard up, we'd been lucky enough to have been accepted for what we were, clean respectable and well behaved youngsters. So to be sneered at, merely because we lived in a bright new house, on a bright new estate, came as a shock to me. At the impressionable age of fifteen, I began to wonder if perhaps there was something to be ashamed of, living on a council estate. So for a time I told everyone who asked, that I lived just off Elmstead Lane, which was perfectly true but it also gave the impression that I lived in Chislehurst. Later on I realised how silly this was and I gave my proper address and any unpleasant remarks got the cutting answer they deserved!

*Dorothy Barton (St Helier to Mottingham)*



*High standards of cleanliness on estates.  
First mechanical road-sweeper, Dagenham UDC.  
Becontree 1930*

## RIFFRAFF

If you were on the St Helier Estate, people with private houses thought you were riffraff.

*Vi (St Helier)*



*The 'Downham Wall' built by private residents to distance themselves from council tenants.  
General view from Alexandra Crescent, Bromley, 1927*

personal inconvenience because he was on early and late shifts. In those days you didn't have staff buses to take you into work and if you had to be on at four o'clock in the morning you didn't have the transport to get you there. It was your job to be at the garage and my father would have to walk a good hour or more.

*George Evans (Downham)*

## TRAINS

To us that lived in Islington, Burnt Oak was right out in the country. My brother and his family were among the first to move onto the estate and as a child I used to come out to 'the country' at weekends to visit them. We got to Burnt Oak, on the Northern Line, from The Angel. There was one single underground line that used to finish at Edgware which was quite new. The trains were all nice and it was like a country line.

When the estate was being built, there was quite a bit of work as factories were starting to open up along the Northern Line, down the Edgware Road and in Colindale. The factories had come out to accommodate the people that lived here as the whole area was expanding.

*Violet Bunyan (Watling)*

## A LONG WALK TO THE STATION

Father was lucky because he was a railwayman and had free travel. The nearest station was Chadwell Heath. Poor devil, it was about one and a half miles to the station. There was no way of getting there, so he had to walk one and a half miles to the station to get to work and one and a half miles to get home. It never changed in his time, he did the same old walk till he retired.

*George Herbert (Becontree)*

My husband was an electrician and worked in Ladbrooke Grove W10. When we moved to Watling it meant he had further to travel. There were no buses in Watling so my husband would have to walk, rain or snow, about a mile to catch the train.

*Elizabeth Knight (Watling)*

'TOT (TRAINS, OMNIBUSES AND TRAMS) STAFF MAGAZINE.' JULY 1928.

### REBUILDING OF BURNT OAK STATION (WATLING)

*This will be completed in August and a spacious and attractive station will be the result. The rebuilding was rendered necessary owing to the rapid growth of the traffic consequent upon the development of the Watling Estate. A population of 8,000 already reside*

**LONDON COUNTY COUNCIL**

**BECONTREE ESTATE**  
(Population 115,000)

**SITES FOR FACTORIES ARE AVAILABLE**

HOUSES, CHURCHES, SCHOOLS,  
SHOPPING CENTRES, CINEMAS, etc.  
have been provided



The Northern sections of the Estate can be reached by train from Liverpool Street and Fenchurch Street to Goodmayes and Chadwell Heath Stations, and the Southern sections by District and L.M.S. Railways to Upney, Becontree, Heathway and Dagenham Stations

Application for Factory Sites should be made to  
The Valuer, Valuation, Estates and Housing Department,  
The County Hall, Westminster Bridge, S.E.1

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## AN ADVENTURE

I enjoyed travelling on the train from Downham, it was an adventure and I used to love going to work. Because of the influx into the area of ten thousand people, the railway wasn't prepared. Very often you had to line up to get your ticket, and the trains were late. In those days people didn't have a lot of money, so you didn't buy monthly tickets, they were just out of the question. If you got to the station late in the morning, you sometimes missed your train. The trains had tiny, narrow carriages and were old. You had to push to get in.

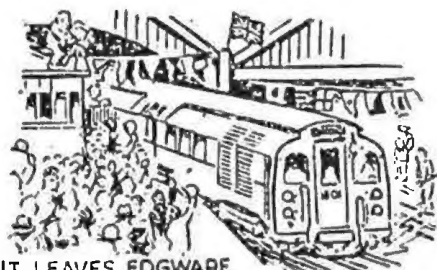
*Richard (Downham)*

*there and eventually there are to be 4,000 houses with accommodation for 16,000 to 18,000 people. In January 1925, Burnt Oak Station handled 5,317 passengers. In January 1926 there were 6,898, and the following January 19,042.*



FOLLOWING RECENT TRAMCAR INNOVATIONS & THE SIX WHEELED BUS, WE ARE PLEASED TO SEE THINGS MOVING ON THE RAILWAY SIDE. —

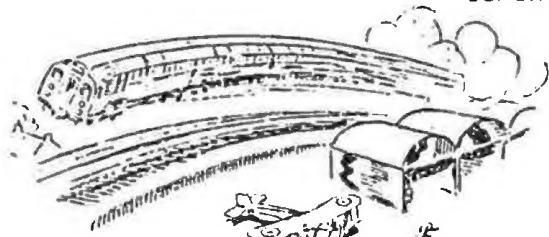
WE NOW HAVE A REAL EXPRESS TRAIN ON THE HAMPSTEAD RAILWAY.



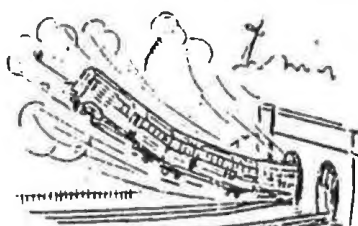
IT LEAVES EDGWARE SOMETIME DURING THE MORNING



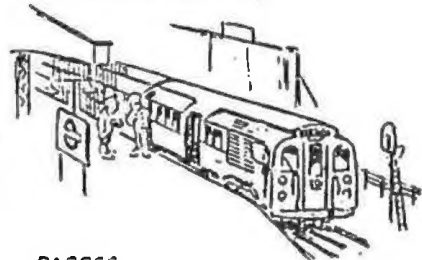
—PASSES BURNT OAK



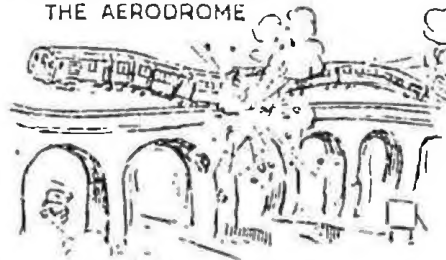
—DOES HALF A CIRCUIT OF THE AERODROME



DIVES INTO THE BURROUGHS TUNNEL, —IT IS WARMER BELOW



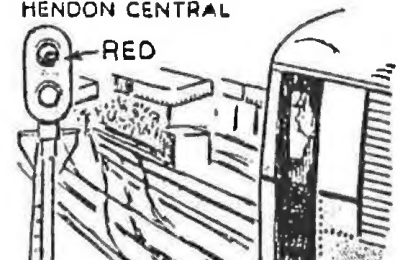
PASSES HENDON CENTRAL



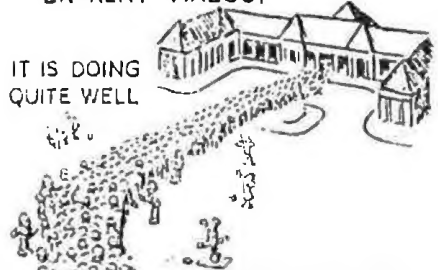
—HURLS ITSELF ACROSS THE BR-RENT VIADUCT



—LEAVES THE PREVIOUS TRAIN STANDING AT BRENT



—AND ULTIMATELY REACHES GOLDERS GREEN, (WITHOUT A STOP)



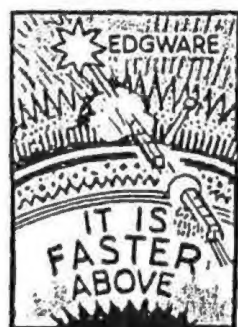
IT IS DOING QUITE WELL

PASSENGERS HAVE QUEUED UP FOR IT

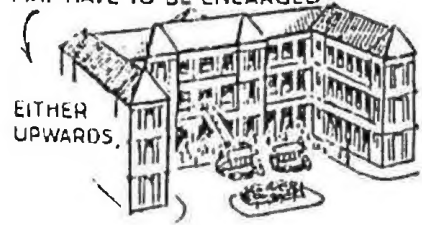


PRESS PHOTOGRAPHERS HAVE PHOTOGRAPHED IT

AND WE VERY NEARLY HAD A POSTER OUT ABOUT IT



IN FACT, EDGWARE STATION MAY HAVE TO BE ENLARGED



EITHER UPWARDS.

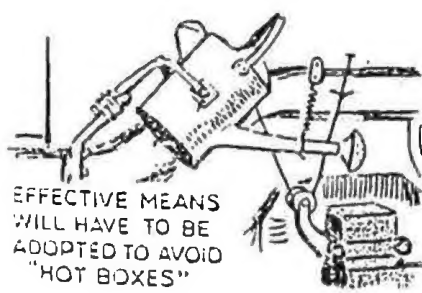


—OR SIDWAYS

IF WE DO MORE OF THIS SPEED BUSINESS WE SHALL SOON BE TAKING PEOPLE IN FROM THESE LITTLE MAIN LINE RAILWAYS FOR LESSONS.

THERE IS SOME TALK OF PROVIDING A BREAKFAST CAR ON THE NEW TRAIN. —

PASSENGERS FOR GOLDERS GREEN WOULD JUST HAVE TIME FOR A SHRED OF WHEAT OR A GRAPE NUT.



EFFECTIVE MEANS WILL HAVE TO BE ADOPTED TO AVOID "HOT BOXES"



PS SO FAR, NO EXPRESSES OPERATE IN THE REVERSE DIRECTION, THEY MIGHT FORGET TO STOP AT EDGWARE

## DON'T BE LATE

The last workmen's train from Grove Park, the nearest station to the Downham Estate, was a quarter to eight in the morning. You wouldn't dare go after that because the price would go up half as much again.

*Arthur (Downham)*

There wasn't much employment for men in Bellingham so everybody went off the estate for work. All the men would have to leave before a certain time in the morning to get their cheap train or tram ticket.

*Patricia (Bellingham)*

Dad was working in Hendon when we moved to Roehampton and he had a lot of fare to pay. There wasn't that sort of money to spare and my parents had to go quite tight on it.

*Ivy Woollett (Roehampton)*

## BICYCLE

Soon after we moved to St Helier one of my father's brothers heard of a job going at the Surrey Docks in Deptford. Although it wasn't his kind of work, Dad jumped at it, having been out of work for well over a year.

Having spent everything moving out, we couldn't afford to go back to London so, rather than turn down the job, Dad managed to get hold of an old heavyweight black bike, the 'sit up and beg' kind, with no gears. He got it in working order, and cycled twenty miles every day from St Helier to Deptford and back, rain or shine, summer or winter. He would leave home at five in the morning and wouldn't return till six or seven at night. He would stop off at various people's houses and have a cup of tea and a rest. That way he was able to keep up on family and friends.

After about two years Dad stopped cycling. He had paid back all the money that his family had lent him and was now able to walk to Morden and take public transport into work. In 1937 Mum decided that the journey back and forth to the docks was wearing my father out so she applied for a transfer to the Downham Estate. The council decided to give her a place in the newly built Mottingham Estate instead.

*Dorothy Barton (St Heller)*

## WORK

When the Watling estate was first built there was quite a bit of work as factories were starting to open up along the Northern Line and down the Edgware Road into Colindale. The area was expanding so the

factories had come out to accommodate the people that were moving into the area. When I first came to Watling, I worked in a book binding factory but one of the biggest employers was the De Havilland Aircraft factory behind the Co-op.

*Violet Bunyan (Watling)*

There wasn't much employment for men in Bellingham so most men went off the estate for work. They would have to leave early in the morning to get their cheap ticket for either the train or the tram.

My husband was what they called the Labour Master in the docks. I used to get up at half past five to give him his tuck box and then see him off. He took the tram to Greenwich Church and then he would walk through the tunnel to the Isle of Dogs to be there in time to call the men and be organised by seven o'clock. His job was to call out the names of those men that he wanted. Those that hadn't been called would go running as fast as they could to the next door dock. If they couldn't get the work then they had no money. That is what some people call the good old days!

*Patricia (Bellingham)*

## DOWN-AND-OUT-HAM

My Father was a wood-block parquet floor layer and all his jobs came by post. His firm would send a letter with the details of his next job and Dad would go from home to the job. When we came out to Downham all the roads were unmade and it took a while for the post to get organised. There was only one post a day and because of this Dad lost lots of work. By the time he got the letters, his firm had already sent for somebody else because he hadn't turned up.

The rent was always paid on time but if Dad didn't work he didn't get paid. Before we moved he'd had quite a good bank balance and the idea of eventually buying his own house, but because he lost the work, all his savings went. Once the post got organised, then the depression came. My father would swear his luck had changed by coming to the estate and he always called it 'Down-and-out-ham'.

*Doris Pinton (Downham)*

## THE DEPRESSION

The General Strike was in 1926 and we were moved to Downham in 1927. It was the height of the Depression and unemployment was epidemic in those days. My father was a soldier with a very, very good career in the army but he left because my mother was so unhappy on her own. He became unemployed and had to tramp and tramp all over the place looking for a job.

There was real tension in our home because a man who can't find work can be destroyed by unemployment. Then there was my mother who was definitely overworked and miscarrying every year regular as clockwork.



*May Day Labour celebrations, Becontree 1937*

The rent of our three bedroomed house was fifteen shillings and elevenpence a week and I would have to go and pay it every week at the rent office. There was a Means Test and if you had a piano or any furniture, you had to sell it before you could get any money.

The conditions at that time, for lots of people, were dreadful even in Downham. There was hunger and real want and I knew of families who used to rip the doors off their frames and burn them to keep warm in the winter. There was many a time I would have to go over to the shops with a docket from the Relieving Officer. It was shameful and I felt degraded by the poverty.

In those days poverty among poverty stricken people was a sight to behold. When we used to walk back to Deptford to call on family and friends, we would see children in Greenwich that were poorer than us, who had no shoes or socks on their feet.

Eventually my father was able to get a job as a labourer working on building sites and he helped to build the Downham Tavern. My mother also worked and she used to go office cleaning morning and night. She also took in other people's washing and looked after their children. In one aspect my childhood memories of coming to Downham were charming because it was magic there, but then there was the other side, which was a feeling of real, real deprivation.

*Rosina Evans (Downham)*

The vast majority who lived on the Downham estate did casual work but I was lucky as my father was a bus driver, which in those days was a very good job. The man who lived next door to us was a docker and had very, very irregular work. His family had nothing as he could go for weeks or months at

a time with no work, and in those days if you didn't work you didn't get anything, you was skint.

The man next door was very proud and I don't know how they existed. Come the wintertime, when you had the Means Test, he wouldn't go. I can well remember when my mother did the shopping, she would get a carrier bag and fill it up with groceries and leave it on the neighbours' porch. They would have known who it was from but people were proud then and the last thing you did was to let them know you had given it. We weren't more friendly with them because of this, we were just neighbours. People used to do that sort of thing. It was just a fact, a feeling more of the times.

*George Evans (Downham)*

## FORDS OF DAGENHAM

Fords moved from Manchester to Dagenham in 1932 because of the increase in production and the better facilities offered by the area. The new site had a jetty on the River Thames so that boats were able to unload the London garbage, which was used to fuel the power plant. They also brought in the iron ore and took the finished cars, trucks and tractors off for export.

The plant itself was about the size of approximately nine or ten football pitches, with long oblong bays split up into sections. Each section dealt with a different part of the car. Monorails linked all the sections and these picked up the parts and took them to the assembly building. In those day nearly everything was made at the plant and it was quite a major concern, but the car bodies were made at another plant and the only thing that Fords bought in from outside were the tyres, windscreens, and the electrics.

A lot of the workers from Manchester moved with Fords but it also offered employment for people living in the Dagenham area. Working at Fords was the best paid job available but it was very difficult and competitive getting in. An unskilled man working at Fords, on a forty hour week, got paid £3 10s but a qualified tradesman who didn't work for the company, was at least £1 10s under that rate and he probably had to do more hours.

My father came to live in Dagenham in 1932 after having left the armed forces. When he heard that there were jobs going at Fords he applied. He went to see personnel and they took him on. I suppose it was because he had the gift of the gab and was also very healthy.

He was employed to unload the iron ore from the boats. There were twelve hour shifts and it was very hard and dirty work. He stuck it out though and eventually ended up as a clerk to a Personnel Manager.

I joined Fords in 1936 and there were about 10,000 people working for them. I was very lucky because my father had helped me to get a permanent job there which I wouldn't have got without that connection as it wasn't easy to find work in those days. I remember Fords used to advertise when they needed more men for the seasonal work, and if you were unemployed you went to the labour exchange and they would give you a green card, which got you an interview with Personnel.

After the interview you had a medical and if you passed that you were in. You were then told where you had to report to work, which could either be in the rolling mill, the foundry, the assembly, the machine shop or packing shop. It all depended how your face fitted.

Once I was in Fords I had nothing to do with my dad. You were in your own job and you stayed on it. I remember we had to wear a badge with our own number and if you were caught wandering about outside your department you were suspended or sacked. You had to look after your job. As to the seasonal workers, when they were finished Fords would lay so many of them off and it was unusual for them to be taken back on when Fords re-advertised.

*Ted Knightley (Becontree)*

I applied in 1929 to get a London County Council house on the Downham estate, but the council sent me to Dagenham and said it was Becontree or nothing else. At that time, I was working in the docks on the Isle of Dogs and had to start at eight in the morning. When we moved to Dagenham, the train wasn't properly in service so I also had to take a bus, which was often delayed and unreliable. In those days you couldn't be late to work, what with three million unemployed and no work available anywhere, so I ended up by cycling the fourteen mile round trip to and from work. I had to get up at 5 o'clock in the morning everyday and I didn't finish work until 9 o'clock at night, so it was quite an ordeal.

Lots of people travelled to work along the A13 and in the winter it was bitter cold. I remember when a lorry came along all the cyclists would crowd behind it, jockeying for a position, because it gave us protection from the wind. It was a dog eat dog situation.

I did the journey to the Isle of Dogs for five years. Then in 1935 I heard that Fords were looking for more labour. I didn't know anyone there, but I wrote in and got an interview. I really wanted to work at Fords because it was more money, less hours, and the most important thing to me, less travelling.

If you were fit you got a job at Fords and I suppose getting the job went on my physical well-being. It

# SAMUEL WILLIAMS & SONS LIMITED

## DAGENHAM DOCK

ESTABLISHED 1854

*The First Industrial Organisation established in Dagenham now comprising the following Departments:*

- (1). **ESTATE DEPARTMENT.**  
Sites vacant for Industries requiring Road, Rail and River access.
- (2). **CIVIL ENGINEERING DEPARTMENT.**  
The Majority of the factories on our Estate have been built by us.
- (3). **SHIP DISCHARGING AND LOADING.**  
Facilities for loading and unloading Ships up to 3,000 tons.
- (4). **LIGHTERAGE DEPARTMENT.**  
A large fleet of tugs and barges for all purposes.
- (5). **PILING DEPARTMENT.**  
The largest Manufacturers of Concrete Piles in the Kingdom.
- (6). **PRE-CAST DEPARTMENT.**  
All forms of Cast Stone, Granolithic units, Paving Slabs, etc.
- (7). **MECHANICAL ENGINEERING DEPARTMENT.**  
Grab manufacture and mechanical repairs of all kinds.

also could have gone on my personality because I did build myself up a bit, adding in a few fairy stories.

I got paid £3 2s 6d a week, ninepence an hour more than in the docks. We became big moneyed people. In those days you would hear from the locals who weren't employed by Fords, "He works at Fords, he's got plenty of money, he has!" There was that element of jealousy.

Working at Fords gave me a good wage, shorter hours and good conditions. The life of me and my family improved tremendously because of the move to Becontree.

*Bill Waghorn (Becontree)*

## UNIFORM TOWN

The chauffeurs and gardeners in Roehampton village were the ones who gave us the name 'Uniform Town' because we had bus drivers, policemen, tram drivers and postmen living on the estate. When we walked up into the village one of the locals would say, "Hello, here comes Uniform Town." It was all in good fun.

*Leslie Charles Alder (Roehampton)*



# HEALTH AND EDUCATION

## SUGGESTED NURSING ASSOCIATION

*'THE WATLING RESIDENT', 1928*

*On a large estate like Watling, much illness is inevitable, and proper nursing becomes a vital matter if the health of our community is to be maintained. For a population of this size, not less than two nurses are needed. Each would cost one hundred pounds a year. A house must be rented for their lodging. The LCC will rent a five roomed cottage on trade terms only, that is fifty-five pounds a year plus water charges and repairs. Outside help cannot be got. London and Middlesex County Council and the Hendon UDC will make no grants and give no assistance. Other estates*

*such as Becontree are fortunate in being in the area of a powerful County Nursing Association.*

*Most members of the community could well afford five shillings a year, many could afford ten shillings and a few a pound. Anything over the prescribed subscription of five shillings would be in the nature of a free will offering. In this way the needs of the few indigent householders would be provided for free by the extra donations of the better off.*

## COUNTRY AIR WILL IMPROVE YOUR HEALTH

I knew no end of friends who were TB patients. Tuberculosis was very prevalent in those days and anyone with TB got priority points from the doctor to move on to the Dover House Estate. It was on high ground and had fresh air and open space, so it was more or less like the country.

*Leslie Charles Alder (Roehampton)*

Apparently there were quite a lot of people from all areas of London who came to live here because Dover House Road is on a hill and they reckoned, it being high up, there was plenty of fresh air. I got to know this girl on the estate, and she said, "One of my brothers had TB and we got priority treatment. That's how we came to live here."

*Ivy Woollett (Roehampton)*

## THE DOCTOR

We had a lady doctor on the estate, Doctor Margaret Little and she was very good. She never charged much for a visit then. There wasn't a clinic on the estate, but a nurse used to come round, Mrs Perkins, a very nice lady. We used to pay the Watling Association for her. She would come round on her bike and I remember she was very tall and had the usual nurse's uniform of a black coat and hat.

*Marjorie Rutty (Watling)*



*Downham Health Centre.  
Interior of Lecture Hall, 1932*

The main doctor was Dr Bee, he was like a community doctor and in my memory he looked a round jovial pleasant man. He always referred to you by your Christian name, always called my mother Harriet. Dr Bee would come at the drop of a hat and everybody loved him. I remember he wore a suit and waistcoat, and he had a little box of tricks. Dr Bee was always pleasant and never worried about money. If you couldn't pay, you couldn't pay, and he always did the best he could.

*Vera Andrews (Downham)*



*Downham Health Centre. View looking east from Churchdown, 1932*

## MOTHERS AND BABIES

The doctor at the clinic for 'Mothers and Babies' was wonderful. She was there for years and years. She was rather a thin lady with straight grey hair. Doctor was very down to earth and forthright and would tell you what she thought. I remember her practically insulting me at times and at other times praising me to the heavens!

When my son started to get onto his feet, he began to get a bit like his legs were going from under him, so I took him to the clinic. I remember Doctor always used to address the women she saw as 'Mother' and on this occasion she made no exception. She said, "Dreadful, Mother!" I felt awful because I'd had no mother to ask for help about babies and it was my father who had always said to me, "Don't give him this, don't give him that!"

I can remember her saying to me, "You've got to give him cheese." And I went home and told my father, and he said, "You can't give a young child cheese, it will sit on his chest all night." But I was determined and I gave my son cheese. She also sent my son for sunlight treatment, two, three times a week at Lewisham Hospital. He was alright after a while and there's nothing wrong with his legs now, they are very sturdy.

I remember on one occasion taking my daughter to the clinic and the doctor said to me, "Mother, you must be a wonderful cook, because your child is absolutely perfect." I said, "Well my son doesn't think so." "Why not?" she said, and I replied, "Oh,

he finds fault with everything, but my daughter doesn't. She eats everything." After that I knew that I had done well with my second child even if I hadn't done so with the first.

*Phyllis Rhoden (Downham)*

## ALL BOOKED UP

My wife was expecting Betty when we came to the estate so we were looking round for a hospital. The nearest one was in Epsom, which is about five miles away. With the influx of people, from this big estate, there were a lot of women pregnant. Epsom said to us, "We're sorry but we are all booked up, in fact you have to book up to get pregnant!"

There was only one thing left and that was to go to the council. I saw this man from the council and I said to him, "We've just come on the estate and my wife is expecting a baby in September." And he said, "I'll let you know if we've got anything." In August I still hadn't heard from him, so I went down to the council again. "My wife is expecting, I came down here in June to tell you." "Oh you'll have to make your own arrangements, I've got nothing for you," says the official. "I'm going to call an ambulance and you can take her to a hospital in bloody Edinburgh as far as I'm concerned," I said, and the man from the council says, "You can't do that." "Can't I? You bloody watch!" "Just one minute, try this address. She'll get a room of her own for three pound a week," and he gives me the name of this council maternity home.

When my wife was having her baby the nurse said to her, "You're the first patient we've had from the council. They're usually the councillors and officers with their wives that come in here." So that home had been reserved just for people from the council!

When we'd settled into our new home, one of the things I used to hate, I used to fear it, was coming home from work to hear my wife say, "Oh, by the way." As soon as she said that, I knew it meant a crisis and it was going to cost me! "By the way, Betty's ill." (Betty's my daughter) "It's going to cost us half a crown." So I would have to hand over my last half a crown. I would then have to walk instead of taking the tuppenny bus ride to and from the station to catch my train for a week until the next pay day.

*Alfred Gates (St Heller)*

She had a helper called Mrs Poultry and she lived across our road. Her hair was tied right back off her round face and she reminded me of a workhouse lady. She was very, very kind and did everything for about a shilling. She cooked the meals, looked after me, took care of my husband and my step daughter and I didn't have anything to worry about.

I remember she had the most peculiar ways. A few days after I had my son, I wanted to go downstairs with him. Mrs Poultry said, "No way must you take that child down in this world before he goes up!" She made me stand on a chair and hold him up, before I could go downstairs, and believe me, I think it worked because my son did extremely well.

*Patricia (Bellingham)*



*Downham Health Centre. Interior of Female Waiting Room, 1932*

## THE MIDWIFE

A midwife lived on our estate. She was marvellous and everybody went to see her. I remember she wore big lace up shoes, had a black push bike and a big Gladstone bag.

After she delivered my son, and it came time to give her a present she said, "For every baby I deliver on this estate, a rose tree is planted in my garden." So we had to go and buy a rose tree. We watched her put it in her garden, which was beautiful because she was the only midwife round Bellingham.

## A TRAGIC STORY

There were two retired nurses, sisters called the Glennisters. They bought the farmhouse, the only old building left on the Castelnau estate, and turned it into a nursing home. Quite a lot of mothers had their babies there.

*Mabel Wallis (Castelnau)*

The chubbier of the sisters was big and fat and more motherly than the other one, who was little, thin and very, very terse, very sharp. They were self-appointed midwives and had no certificates, which

you didn't need to have at that time anyway. They didn't have a doctor in attendance at the nursing home while I was there. I suppose they wanted to be independent of doctors.

I remember they had a young girl, definitely a maid of all work, and she never seemed to go out. She was no more than twenty and she used to worry me because it seemed as though her life was just one round of cooking, running up and down and cleaning. Whether she depended on those sisters for her keep, I don't know, but I never saw her smile.

The nursing home had quite a few rooms, the biggest one could take four people and when I was there I was in a room with three beds and I believe there were more rooms upstairs.

During my first pregnancy, I was under their care and I remember I went to them and said that my friend, who was also expecting at the same time as me, was twice as big, and I asked them why was I so small. They said, there was nothing wrong with me, as I was a small person and it was a small baby. My friend also used to say to me, "That's the little foot sticking out," and I was worried because I didn't feel the same movement. I would say to the thin midwife, "Well, I don't get anything like that," and she'd say, "Oh you mothers with your first baby, you make such a fuss! When it's your fourth or your fifth, you won't be so keen to come over and see me." Then all she'd do was feel my pulse and my tummy and say it was just simply a small baby.

I was in King Street, Hammersmith, when the baby started to come. It was three weeks early and I had these terrible pains and was in an awful sweat, even though it was icy cold. I looked up and like an angel, there was my mother-in-law. I went to her and she said, "I must get you home." Well it wasn't worth taking the bus because the bus took too long to get round Hammersmith and over the bridge to Barnes, so we walked and I went straight to the nursing home.

I had the baby in this tiny room. It was absolutely bare, nothing but a bed, a table and a screen, which they never used, and lino on the floor. It was very sparse, a bit like something from Charles Dickens. My baby came and it was delivered. I still had my coat on. The chubby sister then whispered something and the thin sister simply said, "Oh the baby's dead, don't worry about that, just get on!" It was like she had stuck a knife in me, no feeling, you know what I mean?

My baby had in fact been dead for nearly a month and I was very lucky to get away with my life. Well of course they got in trouble over that. I stayed on

at the home for about a fortnight and it wasn't run the way it should have been, not in a hygienic way. They only bathed and washed you once a day there, that was it. One woman said to me, "I'm absolutely smelling, I really need sorting out," and I believe her husband complained.

After the war in about 1946, a young girl from the estate had her baby in the nursing home. It was her first baby and everything was alright, then she suddenly had a haemorrhage and died before she got to the hospital. I think that was the beginning of the end for the Glennisters. It was then over for all midwives like them when the government brought out a law saying that midwives had to have a proper certificate.

*Lillian Badger (Castelnau)*

## THE BIRTH CONTROL CLINIC

When we first moved to the Becontree in 1926, there wasn't a doctor on the estate. Doctor Bacchus lived in the village but you couldn't go to him because he charged too much. We did have a health clinic but it took three quarters of an hour to walk there from where I lived. Whenever I needed to go, I would have to arrange for my husband to stay at home and look after the children.

The clinic was a makeshift place with a corrugated iron roof and it was very, very primitive. You didn't need to make an appointment so you just turned up. There wasn't a consulting room and I remember they had this little enamel bowl, which was chipped, and we had to drop our clothes into that before we were examined. If you were an expectant mother, no advice was given to you at all and they would tell you, "Everything is alright." No one was there to tell you that you might have to see the doctor because something was wrong. Where I lived on the estate most women didn't bother going to the clinic but saw the local midwife and she would also tell expectant mothers that everything was alright. As time went on the council began to appoint qualified midwives and they made sure that there was one in every area of the estate. They gave them a house and allowed them to put up a brass plaque with their name on it.

There wasn't a birth control clinic on the estate and I lost an unwanted baby. The experience affected me very much. If I had known about an effective form of birth control, I would never have become pregnant. At that time I was quite actively involved with the Co-operative Women's Guild and was chairwoman of Grays Co-operative Education Committee. I attended one of our Guild meetings, where I heard a woman called Mrs Edmonds, a miner's wife, speak to us about family planning. After the talk I was asked to move a vote of thanks



and I told her that I wished she had come a year before as I would never have become pregnant if I had known how to prevent it.

Mrs Edmonds was obviously affected by what I said as she asked me whether I had any objection about being sent to the birth control clinic in Walworth Road. I asked my husband first, because he was a Catholic, and he was very supportive of the idea. He said, "I don't want to see you go through the last experience again. If there's any decent way to stop another pregnancy I would like it."

So I attended a course which taught me all about birth control and I was fitted out with a cap. After that I was so thrilled, pleased and relieved that I wasn't going to have any more problems that I really went out speaking about birth control. I went and spoke to sixty women from the estate and I told them that since I started practising birth control I had never lived a happier non-worrying life. I then went on to help start up a birth control clinic on the Becontree estate.

In 1935 the council gave us a clinic in Becontree Avenue but we had to find the money for the doctor, the equipment and all the other odds and ends. I used to put up little notices about the clinic, and push leaflets through the doors of people who had a lot of children encouraging people to come and visit us.

Seven of us worked in the clinic and we used to charge a shilling a visit and the rest we had to cadge. I would go out to factories and talk to the wives of the manufacturers. I explained to them about what we were doing and then we would be sent donations. I remember I once came away with a cheque for a hundred pounds!

The clinic was very hard work but rewarding. It was eventually to set me on the course of local politics. You see, even though I hadn't had much of an education, I was a person who always wanted to know, "Why? Why haven't we got this or that, or why is it like the way it is?" Even though I was eventually to move off the Becontree estate, I still came back as I wanted to do as much as I could towards helping the community.

*Annie Prendergast (Becontree)*

## A BRAND NEW SCHOOL

It was during the summer holidays of 1925 when we moved to Downham and there were quite a lot of new people arriving at the same time. I went to the Rangefield Road School on the estate. It had only just opened and the school had a great influx of pupils all at the same time.

The estate was big and we tended to stick with people in our area. The children who lived on what we called the Downderry side, the north side of the estate, they would have to go to Downderry School, so they didn't have to cross the Downham Way which was a very busy road.

*John Edwin Smith (Downham)*



*Rangefield School, Downham, under construction*

## NO SCHOOL TODAY

I was six when we moved to Watling and there were no schools on the estate. I didn't go to one until I was nearly eight and then it was in these temporary huts because they were still building the Goldbeaters school. I watched that school being built and I remember we used to play in the trial pits which were dug before the builders put in the foundations.

My parents didn't really mind that there were no schools to start with because it was all open and there was plenty of space to play. You see they were delighted that they had come to a new house, a house of their own.

*Mr Spicer (Watling)*

When I came down here there were no schools available, they weren't open. So I finished school at thirteen and for about nine months I was just doing nothing, just going into the fields and pinching carrots and cabbages and all sorts.

*George Herbert (Becontree)*

## LOST SCHOLARSHIPS

I sat for a scholarship for this school in Poplar, and I got it. I was due to go to this school but it never materialised because Mother moved us all to Dagenham. The school was now too far away from our new home and the only scholarship transfer I could get was for this school in Romford. Well in

those days the buses never went from Dagenham to Romford so I lost my scholarship and I ended up going to the local estate school which had just been built.

*Florence Essam (Becontree)*

We moved to St Helier in the early part of the summer, so I didn't have to go to school, in fact there was no sign of a school anywhere nearby, so we spent all our time playing in the fields behind the houses. There was a wide deep stream in one of the fields and, together with the rest of the children in our road, we kept ourselves amused by building a bridge from all sorts of bits and pieces like logs, broken gates and fences, and anything else we could find.

After we had moved I found out that I had won a free scholarship to a fee paying school in London but had lost it by moving away. I'm afraid I made my parents' life hell for a long, long time over that and it took me a long time to settle down.

*Dorothy Barton (St Heller)*

## THE RED BITS ARE OURS

The Lowther School was the only school in the district and I went there in 1932 just before my fifth birthday. The first teacher I had was Miss Fairclough for the junior class. She taught us reading. I was pretty fortunate because my mother had already taught me to read small words. All round the walls of our classroom were pictures. There was a cat, a dog, a rat, a mouse, whatever.

One of the first lessons we were given was about the Empire and we were taught to be very patriotic. I can remember as though it was yesterday, Miss Fairclough pulled down a damn great map of the world, and on it was all this red, which of course denoted the Empire. She told us, "That is ours, that belongs to us." That has always stuck in my mind.

Empire Day generated a hell of a lot of activity at school. All the little boys, who were in the Cubs would wear their uniform and the girls, in the Brownies, would do the same and there would be the odd party in the street.



*School in Deptford 1930s*



*Dorothy Barley Infants' classroom, Becontree 1934*

In those days every single person got a third of a pint of milk a day which used to be for nothing, and in the winter all the milk bottles were put on the radiators so that the milk wasn't cold when the kiddies came to drink it.

We had to wear a uniform of sorts. I can't remember what the girls wore, but the boys used to have to wear a black and white tie, grey trousers and a blue jacket with the school badge on it. The teachers at the Lowther School were very strict and I can remember the many times we were sent to stand outside Mr Mumford's study. You would probably end up with three or four strokes across the hand for being a naughty boy or girl. Nevertheless I remember having a tremendous pride for being at the Lowther School.

*Ken Wills (Castelnau)*

## LOOKED DOWN ON

I came from a very good school in Westminster and when we moved to the Castelnau Estate I had to go to the 'Green School', Barnes Central. We were all made to feel inferior there. When it came to leaving, my mother had to go and see the Headmistress about different jobs for me. She said to my mother, "Oh, that's alright, she's only an estate girl, put her in service."

*Mabel Wallis (Castelnau)*



*Interior of Junior Library, Becontree 1930s*

## A WONDERFUL SCHOOL

When we first moved to Downham, I went to this school at Lee. It was a rather old-fashioned school and I was there till they built Launcelot Road School on the estate.

I was one of the first pupils ever to set foot in Launcelot Road School and it was light, airy and wonderful. There were all these beautiful tiles on the wall and I'd never seen anything like that before. There were about six classrooms for the infants. Then, the boys school was downstairs and the girls school was upstairs. I remember we had beautiful polished floors. There was a big playground for us to play in as well as small gardens attached to the school.

*Phyllis Rhoden (Downham)*

classes. I think they were the children with TB and they used to have milk, and in the winter it was heated up for them. The open air classes were held in an open shed in the playground, which had windows covered with canvas.

*Florrie Abel and Gladys Hanson (Bellingham)*

## A PROGRESSIVE SCHOOL

I went to Churchdown Senior Girls School, Bellingham. The boys were upstairs and the girls downstairs. We had open political debates, which were really very progressive and there were lots of 'out of school' activities for us to do. The teachers voluntarily organised clubs. We had a music appreciation class, and there was stamp collecting and the Brownies, all sorts of different clubs.



*Open-air class, Rangefield Road, Downham 1927. Mr Murray, class teacher on left, Mr Hooley, Headmaster, on right*

## OPEN AIR CLASSES

From five to fourteen years old, we went to Athelney Street School, which is still on the estate. The boys used to be at one end of the school and the girls the other with the primary school at the back. It was just an ordinary school, you didn't have lunch there, or even milk. The only time I had milk was when I sat for my scholarship. For the weak children, who had something wrong with them, there were open air

Before I left school at fourteen, in 1934, my class were taught how to write letters, apply for jobs and use a telephone. We used the school phone for that. Looking back on it we had a good education.

*Winifred (Bellingham)*



## NINETY-NINE OUT OF A HUNDRED

School was reached by an indirect route since the railway arch at Westhorpe Avenue had not been built. We walked about three miles there and back. My friend had a ride in a push chair in her earlier years, a wooden framed one with a carpet seat and back. We were both under eight years old and just two of many children attending the only school built at that time. It was Haimo Road, and it still looks the same after sixty-three years. We returned for the sixty years celebrations at the invitation of the head.

I remember the wild flower competition when all pupils in the junior school were asked to collect as many wild flowers as possible. These were put in paste jars on a long table and we were asked to identify them. My elder sister won with a mark of ninety-nine and I came second with seventy-eight. It would be very difficult to find ten wild flowers now in the roads around the school.

*Irene Swanton (Page Estate, Eltham)*



*Athelney Street School, Bellingham.  
Dutch garden 1923*

## SCHOOL UNIFORM

When there was anything like Empire Day, we had our photo taken at school. Kids in drill slips were obviously the ones put in front because they looked the best. Us that hadn't got them were at the back because we didn't make the photo look so good. The civil servants' kids had no problem getting drill slips but my mum couldn't afford to buy ones for my sister and me. I did manage to get a second hand one which belonged to the sister of someone in my class. My mum pressed the drill slip up, and the lady next door was a dressmaker and she altered it so it fitted me and was alright.

The convent in Roehampton Lane, where the moneyed people sent their kids, used to have jumble

LONDON COUNTY COUNCIL.

LEWISHAM, E:

THE DOWNDERRY L.C.C. (J.B.) SCHOOL,  
DOWNDERRY ROAD, DOWNHAM ESTATE, School.  
BROVILEY, KENT.

OCT. 1929

Report on Attendance, Conduct and Progress,  
for the Elementary School Year ended

Name *Robert Goodall* No. of Pupils in Class: *44*

Class *1B* Attendance *192* Place in Class:

Note—Ex. Excellent; V.G. Very Good; G. Good; V.F. Very Fair; F. Fair

Religious Knowledge *V.G.* Handwriting *G* Additional Subjects

Reading *G* Arithmetic *G*

Spelling *G* Science

Composition *G* Drawing *G*

Practical Work *G* Geography

*Handwriting* History

CONDUCT: *Very good.*

REMARKS: *Absent from the examination  
Has done good work during the  
term.*

*R. Barker* Class Master

*R. Barker* Head Master

Form *5*

*School Report, Downderry School, Downham 1929*

sales every so often. Another neighbour, Mrs Glanville, went up there and she bought her girls, my sister and me a drill slip each. My drill slip was made of beautiful material. Braid and buttons were bought for us, so when we got to school, we wouldn't all look like convent girls. Nearly all the girls at Huntingfield had these slips, so it was important to try and disguise them in some way. Mrs Granville did us all up different and I had green braid and red buttons. And I felt a lot better going to school wearing my drill slip.

*Ivy Woollett (Roehampton)*

When I was at school I remember the teachers used to ask if any of the children from the private houses had any clothing they could bring in. Periodically they had wicker baskets full of clothing and the teacher would open it up and if she liked you, she'd pick out the best piece of clothing for you.

My brother got through to Hendon County High School which meant new uniforms and whatever. He didn't get a grant and my parents never knew why. Dad was only on the Underground, and my parents used to break everything down to the last penny. We knew people who had lots more money coming in that got grants. It was another struggle for my parents.

*May Millbank (Watling)*



*Churchdown School, Bellingham. South frontage 1930*



*Churchdown School, Bellingham. Interior of Boys' Hall 1930*



*Lowther School, Stillingfleet Road, Castelnau 1929*

## NEW CAPS AND TIES

When we moved to Castelnau I was thirteen and only had one year at school to go, so I carried on at St Dunstons in Fulham. The people that lived next door had a boy the same age as me and we both used to walk together, over Hammersmith Bridge, to Fulham Palace Road. Half an hour it used to take us.

We did this for six months and then the council got onto the education people at Barnes, and said as we lived in Barnes we should be going to school there. So we had to leave St Dunstons and go to Barnes Central for the last six months. We had to have new caps and ties with all that extra cost just for the last six months!

*Stanley Breeze (Castelnau)*

## THE ORANGE HILL SISSIES

I went to the Orange Hill Central Girls School which opened in 1931. It was a High School and I was the only one in our road who went there. All

the teachers had caps and gowns and it was one of the finest and most modern buildings in London. It was built in the cloister style and there was a proper domestic science block and we had an art room, where we all used to sit around with easels, like proper artists.

I never experienced any snobbish attitude at school because we were all working class people. Those that did lord it over people, mum used to call the overnight rich, the ones that forget their backgrounds quickly. The people who didn't go to the school thought that we became toffee-nosed and we got the name the 'Orange Hill Sissies'.

I remember once we were told by a teacher not to mix with the elementary schools. I told my mother and she said, "Well you can get that idea out of your head as quick as you like because the elementary school kids are as good as you, so don't come home with your fancy ideas from Orange Hill."

*Amy Ewell (Watling)*

## NIGHT SCHOOL

There was a night school at the Orange Hill School. It was very cheap, about half a crown for a lesson, or ten shillings if you enrolled for a whole course. Women mostly went along, though the odd lad would turn up to a class. I started at the night school when the children got bigger and I was able to leave them at home. There was a list of things you could do like cooking and carpentry. Or there was English, Geography and History but I was too scared to touch those subjects.

*Elizabeth Knight (Watling)*

# SHOPPING



*Trader with horse and cart selling groceries on Becontree*

## STREET TRADERS

As the estate was growing and quite a way from the shops, we decided we'd do a lot of trade, and at first there were no competitors. We were down in Barnes so we'd push the barrow up to the estate and spend the day up there, the governor and myself. His wife used to look after the shop.

Quite a lot people on the estate used paraffin because it was a cheap form of heating in those days. We used to go round with a big drum with a tap on a barrow as people didn't like carrying their heavy cans of paraffin up and down from the shops at the bottom of the estate. We used to measure it out for them. We sold it for elevenpence halfpenny a gallon. They'd give you the odd halfpenny. You know we didn't expect it, they were just appreciative at not having to carry it.

As well as the paraffin, we used to sell soap and soap powder and a big box of hardware. In the summer months we didn't sell much and we took mostly gardening stuff round. Lattice work, gardening

equipment, seeds, paper and paint, stuff like that. It was quite a job.

At first people weren't expecting you, but once you'd got known, then of course you didn't do too badly at all. We used to knock on the doors and they used to say whether they wanted anything or not. There was always somebody wanting something. Sometimes you'd get, "Would you like a cup of tea, I've just made one." We used to get all that. Being the first on the estate, the customers were very loyal to you. They wouldn't buy off anyone else unless they were right out of what they needed.

*Bob Cubitt (Roehampton)*

When we first moved to the Roehampton Estate there wasn't a lot of street traders, there were two greengrocers, from the same family. One used to do one side of the estate, and the other used to do our side. The only other street trader was a little fellow with an old Morris van and he used to bring round the groceries.

*Jim Evans (Roehampton)*

The milkman was at the bottom of the Dover House Road, and he was eventually taken over by the Express Dairy. When you moved in, in those days, the milkman used to come round and leave a couple of pints of milk. The baker came round the bottom of Dover House Road pulling a barrow.

The shops at the bottom of the estate were all popular and well used. I took up a Saturday job with the United Kingdom Tea Company. There was a chap there who used to go out in the mornings collecting orders with a horse and cart, a charabanc driver. He'd knock on all the doors, collecting orders from the customers. They'd be made up and we would deliver them in the afternoon.

*Ivy Woollett (Rochampton)*



*Ravenscar Road, Downham, looking east from Shroffold Road, 1928. Note Daren bread delivery van*

Downham was visited by many travellers and door to door salesmen, and in those days no charge was made for deliveries. The most consistent were the baker's roundsmen, who came with a covered cart. Their counterparts, the milkmen, came from at least three different dairies, United, Co-op and Express. However, the most popular was Groom's, always called Groomsie, who with a horse drawn cart, could supply his customers with all manner of household necessities in the bread and grocery line. My mother being a keen Co-operator never patronized Grooms but preferred to visit our main Co-op store in Bromley.

The newspaper boy came round every evening calling out, "Star, News, and Standard." We didn't buy these as we had, The Daily Herald delivered, and on Sundays the Reynolds News. Saturdays we paid for the papers, and the insurance man from the Co-op would also come to collect his few pence.

On a Saturday evening quite a crowd would gather near the Downham Tavern, where there was an entertainment at Gorston's, the butchers. A young

man played the spoons to attract customers to the weekly auctioning of the unsold joints of meat.

A hot pie man, a muffin man and a shrimps and winkles vendor, all regular as could be, would come round. The Indian toffee man made the occasional appearance and a local chap would wheel round trays of sour toffee apples for a halfpenny each.

There were always gypsies coming to the door with their lucky heather and clothes pegs, which were made out of two hefty pieces of split shaped branches, joined with strips of tin. It was considered improvident to refuse them as it was said they would leave identifying marks for their friends. If we saw them coming we were conveniently out.

A welcome visitor was Miss Jones, an educated lady, who took orders for dressmaking and knitting, which would be paid for in instalments of a shilling a week. Mother knitted all our vests and made the odd dress, so we didn't give Miss Jones an awful lot of custom.

*Phyllis Rhoden (Downham)*

## STREET CALLS

We almost lived by dealing straight from the street traders until we got some shops near us. The milk cart was pushed by a man called Bennett right up the Dover House Road. He was a nice man and the children liked him and he did work hard pushing that cart up the hill. He would call, "Milko," and you'd take your jug out and get a half pint for a penny.

We could get fresh fish then. The fish lady, she used to come round with her barrow and then there was this firewood lady who called out, "Firewood." She had great pieces of wood, which she would cut the





*Shopping Centre, Bromley Road, Downham, 1930*

right length for your fire. They would help make your fire burn quickly. And then there was this other lady. If the kids took an empty jam jar out to her she would give them a windmill made of newspaper, which she had made herself.

The sweep used to come out, and call in the street, "Chimney for a shilling." He didn't live that far away and he cleaned everybody's chimneys on the estate. The sweep must have been a rich man with all his shillings.

I'm afraid we didn't always stick to the rule, to have your chimney swept once a year. I didn't like having the sweep around, oh, he made such a mess! There was no vacuum in those days so you covered up the house as best you could, but the soot used to get everywhere.

*Lillian Beardsmore (Roehampton)*

## PLYING FOR TRADE

When we first moved to St Helier all the local shopkeepers from Rose Hill delivered small packs of their products to us, free, in the hope of getting our custom and this pleased Mum no end. The dairy sent us butter and tea and the baker, bread and cakes. Things were delivered in vans then, but my mother liked to go to the shops herself because she thought it was cheaper in the long run.

It was a long walk to Rose Hill where the nearest shops were. Mother did a bit of shopping during the week but quite often it was a family event and all of us went on a Saturday afternoon to help carry the bags home. It wasn't until later on there was a bus. It improved things quite considerably.



*Shopping parade, Becontree, 1925*

We moved from St Helier to Mottingham in 1937 and I remember, at first, there were no shops at all on the estate and we had to walk all the way to old Mottingham or Chislehurst for everything we needed. The only bus was a single deck one from Bromley to Eltham and of course by the time it got to us at Elmstead Lane it was always full up, so we mostly walked everywhere.

*Dorothy Barton (St Helier to Mottingham)*

When we first came on to the estate, we used to get the milkman, the baker and the greengrocer plying for trade. They tried to get your custom and it worked. How they plied you was, they'd give you a big box of groceries, or you'd get bread for a week. The United Dairy and the Co-op would give you a parcel and you had to make your choice. You could get practically everything off the milkman, butter, sugar and tea if you ran out, and the baker called everyday with his horse and cart.

We were pretty central living in Castelnau. Hammersmith wasn't that far and we did most of our shopping there. It was better then and had some extremely good markets. We didn't have cars in those days, we all had legs, and we were young enough to use them. We didn't feel cut off because the bus service was very good. You knew a bus was going to come along in a couple of minutes so that was alright. It was only a penny ride over the bridge but most people walked.

*Mabel Wallis (Castelnau)*



*Shopping parade, Becontree, 1935*

## OLD SOAP AND GROCERIES

The estate shops at the bottom of Dover House Road were terribly expensive. Mother just couldn't afford to buy from them all the time. We had to run down the road for odds and ends but mostly Mum would go to Putney High Street, a couple of times a week, to do her shopping.

When my father was out of work I can remember we had these blasted relief tickets. During our school dinner breaks, Mum would send me and my brother to the bakers, which was down by Wandsworth Park. Before going Mum would say, "Wait till the shop's empty. Don't go in there when anybody's in there, and don't let anybody see you going in." Not that anyone knew us round there, but still. And we'd run all the way there to get the two loaves of bread.

I remember there used to be this chap with a motorbike outside the school and he would sell halfpenny sweets and toffees from his sidecar. He then went from his motorbike to a little van and started to sell soap and groceries. That became his name in the finish, "Have you seen old soap and groceries?" I never knew his proper name but he worked up a jolly good business on our estate.

*Ivy Woollett (Rochampton)*



*2-20 Woodward Road, Becontree, from south-east*

## THE ERRAND BOY

When we first come to the Becontree Estate there were very few shops. There was a corner shop in Bennett's Castle Lane which was a good walk away, about a quarter of an hour. You could get most provisions there. We'd also go to a little undercover market place in Becontree Avenue. That had been there a long long time. It was a fair old walk, twenty minutes.

In the main, what used to happen was, you'd get a lot of vans bringing groceries to your door. They used to come round the streets with carts or motors, selling saveloys and peas pudding. They'd shout out or ring a bell, and we used to run out and get our stuff. We used to get so many of them. We also got a lot of costermongers with barrows, oranges or apples, that's all they'd sell.



*Shops being erected at Green Lane North, St Helier 1931*

Eventually when they did get the shops, it was at Five Elms which was made into a fair sized parade, there must have been about twenty shops. You had everything, fish shops, wet and fried, plenty of butchers and about three grocers. There was a Co-op which was, in those days, more or less selling everything. They used to call it an emporium. The Co-op used to be a very busy shop.

Jobs were very hard to get in 1926 but I got one on the estate at the Co-op as an errand boy, and I loved the job. I said to myself, "I reckon I'm going to be the best delivery boy ever, there's nobody going to take this job away." That was my attitude.

A lot of people used to have their groceries delivered in them days, mainly because the shops were so far away. It was generally recognised that a lot of people had their orders done with the Co-op. We used to parcel them up and I'd deliver them. First I had a trade bike and I'd pile the parcels on. I used to cycle for miles and miles. I loved it. Eventually they got me a tricycle with a big box on the front. I used to pinch biscuits and cakes, help yourself sort of thing. I started on twelve shillings a week. My mother got all that except for about two shillings. That's all I got. That was the way things were in those days.

*George Herbert (Becontree)*

## A RIDE FOR A JAM JAR

The corn merchant used to come along with his horse and cart and he used to call out, "Soap, soda, candles, matches, penny a lump salt." Penny a lump salt was a big solid piece of salt for cooking. You could also buy a piece of hearth stone and that is what you did your step and copper with.

Every Sunday morning the muffin man came round. He used to wear about three or four caps and have this big tray of muffins balanced on his head, covered up with a sack. He'd ring a bell as he went along and just call out, "Muffins."

There was a man used to come round with a horse and cart. He had a little roundabout on it, that sat about four children. You went inside for an old pair of shoes, or two or three jam jars, something like that and you gave it to the man in exchange for a ride on the roundabout. He'd turn the big handle, which went round on a cog and the children of about four or five would get a ride.

My mother couldn't afford to buy jam in jars so she used to send us to the corner shop for a two pennyworth of jam. It was spooned into a piece of greaseproof paper, and you carried it home like that. You would get into trouble if you licked any of it on the way home. So my mother didn't have

many jam jars, except at Christmas time, and then we got our ride. After the war you didn't see the roundabouts or that sort of thing anymore. It's a shame, it used to be lovely.

*Lilian Badger (Castelnau)*

We had regular traders, The Walls Ice Cream man, Eldorado & Noaks and 'Old Joe' who bought his ice cream on a sidecar with a motorbike. Indian Toffee, a substance just like candy floss but green not pink, was carried by an Asian man in a square zinc canister held by straps around his neck. He made a cone with newspaper, put his hand inside the can and stuck a lump of 'toffee' in the paper. It cost a halfpenny. Sweets were brought round by an old man with a pram which he pushed down every street. And then there was the roundabout on the back of a van pulled by a horse, we could have a ride for a halfpenny or a jam jar. This was worth a halfpenny if returned to a shop so was taken as payment. The driver used to push the roundabout with his hand.

*Joyce Milan (Page Estate, Eltham)*

## A LONG WAY TO THE SHOPS

When I first came to St Helier there were no shops except a newsagent, a pub, a butchers and a greengrocers so we used to have to go into Sutton, three and a half miles away.

*Vi (St Heller)*

## THE MARKET

We used to have the stalls up the Watling Avenue. There was no traffic up there then and when you did see a car everybody would talk. "Did you see that car?" Down the Watling Avenue there were meat and veg stalls. Mum went down there with the money at about six, just as the stalls were packing up and she'd get stuff cheap. You knew the ones that hadn't got a lot because they'd be out shopping last thing Saturday night.

*May Millbank (Watling)*

I'd get thirty shillings a week, off my husband, to keep house on. That was good money as some people didn't even get a pound. I'd go down to the shops in Green Lane which were better then. We could get fresh meat and vegetables and butter. I used to be able to buy a pound of steak and kidney for one and eightpence and I'd make a great big meat pudding or pie with it.

There was a man who lived near me and he worked in the meat market. Now don't ask me how he got the meat because I ain't going to tell you. I'd give him two bob and he used to bring me home a whole English liver and sweetbreads.

As we didn't have fridges, meat was kept in the coldest place. A lot of people made a big hole in the garden. You'd line the hole, put the meat in a tin, and cover it up in the hole. And it would keep Romford Market, was held on Wednesdays and you'd get all the animals there. You'd see the farmers, with their pigs and cows, and all that. I'd take the kids and sometimes we'd walk there and it would take us a good hour. Apart from that we used to go on the number 86 bus which left from Chadwell Heath and cost a penny.

It was really cheap there. When you bought bananas you didn't buy two, the stall keeper would hold up a whole hand of bananas and you bought it. There was one fellah who had a big sweet stall. You used to be able to buy mis-shapes of chocolate and tins of biscuits, which they called 'broken biscuits'. When I say they were good, they were very good! It was a day out for us, Romford, and it was beautiful, what with all the animals, but that's all done away with now.

*Martha Wall (Becontree)*

## PRINCE MONOLULU

A three minute walk away from our house was Grove Park railway station and a few local shops. There was Nunn and Loat, the baker and tea shop, where you could buy a pennyworth of quite edible stale cakes. We very rarely got these as mum made her own cakes. The Grannies Dowden, two old ladies, ran the sweet shop. I don't think they liked children as they were made very unwelcome. Next to Dowdens was the drapery, Vincent and Radford, about the largest and most interesting shop there. The assistants were very helpful and courteous. I remember if half a dozen customers ever entered together it would become pretty crowded. The pure wools at threepence three farthings and tuppence three farthings per ounce were very popular. All manner of cotton ribbons, dress and furnishing materials, sheets, blouses, dresses and underwear could be obtained. Ladies could also buy their stays there, 'the unmentionables', which were displayed generously in one of the windows. I remember wondering why anyone should want to wear these peculiar articles.

Every Thursday Mother used to love going to the Bromley Market and going to Bromley was a weekly adventure. To take a return trip, on the train, from Grove Park to Bromley North, was cheaper than the bus, something to be considered, depending on whether Mother could afford to pay the fare. However we very often walked home from Bromley.

Market Square was a large rambling open place, crowded with folks from all the outlying areas of North Kent and the outer London suburbs. There

were so many different stalls, drapery, clothing and sweets. The attraction to us children was the wonderful smell of paregoric lozenges (cough sweets) which pervaded the atmosphere so strongly that Mother never got away without buying an ounce or two. They were bright orange, long and oval. The flavour was as lovely as the smell, but it was impossible to suck more than a couple without incurring a sore tongue.

The gypsies would be there selling their heather and clothes pegs and we were always a little scared of them. They would say, "Lucky heather, buy some for good luck." The gypsy girls always had a baby tied to their backs by a shawl, so tightly, that the baby couldn't move.

I remember Prince Monolulu, the huge Zulu. He would yell out, "I've got a horse, I've got a horse!" Anyone that was interested, and willing to pay, would get the name of a horse that was going to win a race. He must have been about six foot six and stood above everyone else because he had this big feathered headdress on.

Prince Monolulu was a black man and that was interesting because there weren't any black people around Bromley. He was a well known figure and I

think he went to all the markets. He was around for years and years and years.

The market eventually moved behind the station because they re-developed the market square. It was never quite the same after that.

*Phyllis Rhoden (Downham)*

## THE CO-OP

Once the Watling Estate was built it became a thriving little 'market. People used to come from miles around to Burnt Oak. It was lovely on a Saturday with all the stalls down The Watling Avenue, and in the winter, they had Tilly lights on the stalls, big paraffin lamps.

People used to come from miles round to the beautiful fish stall run by the Wilkinson Brothers. They had the freshest fish you'd buy anywhere. There was also a haberdasher's stall where you'd buy cottons, buttons and button hooks. All the stalls were lovely but they have been banned now and a market has been opened up behind the station. Now you get cars parked along the Watling Avenue instead, which is a shame.



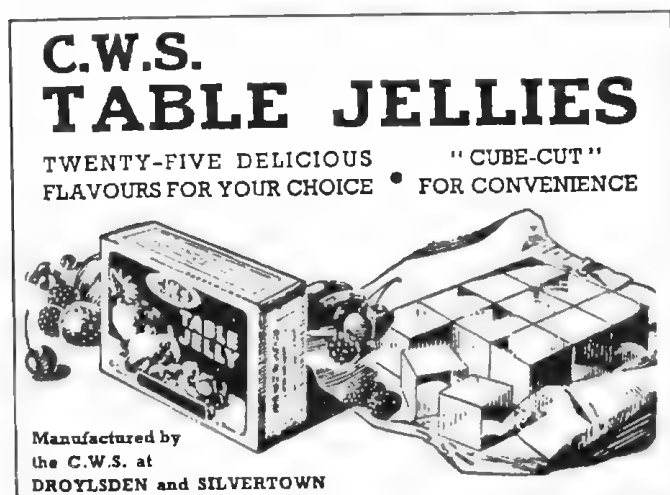
*Co-op horse and cart in station coal yard, Chadwell Heath*



At the top of the Watling there is a great building that used to be a lovely Co-op. It was built just after the estate and was one of the first big stores down here. The Co-op sold everything, carpet, furniture and clothes. On the top floor was all the offices and a restaurant with waitress service. You could see all over London, it was beautiful. When you'd finished your shopping, you could sit up there and have a lovely afternoon cup of tea.

There was another shop called Steeles, people could go there and pay off things, put sixpence down on an article. There was a card and people could pay three pence a week on it until they had enough for their pair of shoes or whatever they were buying. Steeles sold clothes and children's shoes, and at Christmas it would be toys. He was almost a benefactor, I know that he made money out of it but people couldn't really afford to pay out straight away.

*Violet Bunyan (Watling)*



We would wait until Saturday night to go down to Wests, the butcher, in Catford where he auctioned all the meat. He'd hold up a piece of beef, give it a price and if you didn't say yes, he'd then pile sausages on the beef as well. We always had a cooked supper because we got our meat from down there.

We did most of our shopping at the South Suburban Co-op where we had Co-op cheques and you got a dividend of a shilling in the pound. The Co-op cheques were like imitation money. There was this number you had to quote with every purchase that you made and if you were in dire need, you could get a mutual loan or provident cheque from them.

*Patricia (Bellingham)*

## OUR FIRST FRIDGE

I remember one day Mr Hibbert going out shopping and I said, "Bring me back a number eight battery will you?" And he came back with a fridge!

*Mrs Hibbert (Roehampton)*

Yes, that was our first fridge. It was from the electrical shop down the road. It was very, very hot and we hadn't a fridge. I saw this tiny little fridge in there, bought it and they delivered it the same day.

*Mr Hibbert (Roehampton)*

## THE TALLYMAN

Regular callers were the 'tallymen' who did a good trade. It was a temptation for mothers to get clothes for their children, which they often could not afford to pay for, causing a great deal of hardship and persistent bullying and threatening by the tallyman. It was a con trick, he would leave a pair of boots at the door and then call back later for the payment, saying that once taken in they had to be paid for. This happened at my house, but my mother threw the boots at the man as he went out of the gate. We didn't see him again, but some women were quite scared, and petrified their husbands would find out that they owed money.

Trips to the pawnshop were a regular feature. Every Monday parcels of blankets and clothes being taken for a few shillings, and much prized diamond rings and wedding rings being lost forever because the money was not forthcoming to redeem them. My mother pawned both engagement and wedding ring, she bought a sixpenny ring from Woolwich so Dad would not know. She lost the diamond and ruby ring to the pawnbroker but luckily Dad found out about the wedding ring and saved to get it back for her.

*Joyce Millan (Page Estate, Eltham)*

I went pea picking once at Fowlers Farm over at Hainault. I had no money so I said to the family, "Let's go on the bus and go pea picking, earn a bit of money and save getting into debt." We got five shillings for the couple of bags we picked, then we came home and got our food.

I remember the tradesmen, they used to come around. They'd pester you but I wouldn't get into debt. One day a man come knocking at the door and he had some lovely curtains with roses on. So he said, "Want any curtains?" and I said, "Yes," and he said, "Two shillings down, and two shillings a week." I said, "Well, dear, I'll have it for two shillings but I don't know when you'll next get your two shillings." So with that, off he walked. That got rid of him!

*Amelia Cogley (Becontree)*

# LEISURE

'THE TIMES', 4 MAY 1934

## YOUNG WORKERS USE OF LEISURE HOURS IN LONDON. HELP AND FORESIGHT NEEDED

*The lack of provision on the new LCC housing estates is surprising. A survey shows that in these areas the children and young persons of eighteen years and under number 104,000 - more than half the total population and that there are scarcely any facilities for juvenile recreation. There is an immediate need for ten or twelve centres with halls.*

*Downham: in addition to the boys club which Prince Arthur of Connaught will open, there is a branch of the YMCA, and a few church organizations exist, but collectively they can accommodate only a small proportion of the juvenile population.*

*At Becontree, where there are 65,000 children and young persons there is only one boys' club and girls' club with accommodation for 100 and a few units attached to religious bodies.*

*At Bellingham one church and one chapel do something for their own young people but only touch the fringe of the need.*

*At Watling the adult community centre has exclusive use of the hall. To this general survey must be added that the Boy Scouts and the Girl Guides have units which are cramped by the inadequacy of the meeting places.*

*How are halls and centres to be provided? The layout of those estates already developed did not take into account this need and there is not now in all cases available space for recreation, an omission which need not be repeated on the newer estates. There will be financial difficulties and it concerns not the LCC alone but the local authorities in whose areas these new estates are situated. This is how matters stand on the new estates, themselves the size of large towns.*

## NOTHING TO DO

When we grew up, when we were in our teens, there was absolutely nothing on our estate for us to do. No clubs, no nothing! St Margaret's Church eventually did have a girls friendly society and you could go round there once a week but it wasn't a club as such. Huntingfield School started evening classes and when I left there in 1928, I went and learned dressmaking. You know, it was a couple of nights out. The classes would finish at half past nine and if I wasn't at our gate by twenty to ten, my dad was waiting for me with, "Where have you been?"

When we were teenagers, it didn't occur to us then, to have a dance. Money wasn't that plentiful, even when I started work at fourteen, and I got nine and six a week, I had to give Mum some of it. Then I had to pay my fare and if I bought a pair of stockings that was my money gone.

The grown-ups on the other hand had their own club on the estate. Dad used to call it the 'Home wrecker' because husbands and wives used to go round there. It was more of a drinking club, where you got your drinks a bit cheaper. My dad never

joined. I think he went up there once or twice but he got annoyed with the women who would try and cadge drinks. Dad was a pub man and he was well known as a drinker. He kept nearly all the pubs in the village going at different times. My dad could drink!

The estate club also had tennis courts. I remember one girl in particular, her mother used to play tennis. You'd see her going out when we came home from school at lunchtime. She'd be all dressed up in a tennis frock and little ankle socks and shoes. I used to think, "Why can't Mum go out like that?" I sort of envied that girl, because of her mother. It wasn't until years and years later that I wondered who cooked that girl's dinner. My mum was always at home, and ready for us.

*Ivy Woollett (Roehampton)*

## THE IMPS VERSUS THE REDS

There weren't any facilities for children in those days. My mother was one of the leading lights of the Conservative Club and I was made to join the Junior Imperial League, the 'Imps'. We used to meet up at the Huntingfield School once a week. But we,

as kids, found out that by joining the Red Club, the Labour Club, we could get more out of it. You got cakes and lemonade and all that sort of thing, more than what you got if you went to the Conservative Club. At the Labour Club there were a lot of women helpers and they used to organise games and all sorts of things. We would then finish up by singing the Red Flag.

*Jim Evans (Rochampton)*

## A CAREFREE CHILDHOOD

Our new environment was in semi-rural surroundings, modern concrete all-electric houses built around spacious greens, which became our central playing ground. We had organized games, races and displays, all done by the dozens of children, there being many of them as it was a consideration to have several children to be entitled to a council house. We played on these greens until dusk gave way to evening, and then we collected around the lamp post on the corner. Our parents watched most of our play.

Sometimes we ventured further afield. Nearby was an old mansion house falling into decay. This we called 'The Haunted House' and ran all over the house like maniacs. The hallway had fallen in and the stairway was, by today's standards, hazardous. Yet we loved going there.

Everyone was quite poor during the late twenties and early thirties, many men were unemployed and most had large families. I often stayed with friends, and shared one bed with three sisters, sleeping head to toe. It was great fun causing roars of laughter with loud comments of, "Take your foot out of my mouth!"

Every Friday night we watched the firework display from the Crystal Palace, all the kids sitting on the green in the dark, and cries of, "Ooh!" and "Aah!" as we saw the display, having an uninterrupted view. We also saw, in the same way, the old Palace burn down.

A religious group came each week called 'Sunshine Corner' and we all stood around in a circle and sang 'I am H-A-P-P-Y' and 'The best book to read is the Bible'. We all looked forward to this meeting. We used to ride on the back of the Co-op delivery cart Saturday nights. When the horse stopped for groceries to be delivered, we all jumped on the back and rode to the next stop.

Parents hardly ever went socialising. There was a working men's club on the estate and some families went there Saturday and Sunday evenings where there were 'turns', a band and dancing. There was not one pub for quite a long way, most people

could not afford to drink, and although poor they were hard working in the home. In all they were good parents, I cannot recall anyone neglecting their children, even though money was short and debts abounded. It was not 'the good life' but my memories of childhood are very happy.

*Joyce Milan (Page Estate, Eltham)*



*Valence Park paddling pool, Becontree 1931*

There were so many fields and open spaces available to play in. We could cross Westhorne Avenue as if it were a lane to reach a field that was a great playing area. It was lined on one side with a dirt road of huts, and their back gardens were ablaze with flowers. I can smell the roses even now, a real country fragrance. In this field was a large depression that was always full of water with people's rubbish floating about, old tins and tyres, but to us it was like a lake. Coming home from Sunday School my sister, some friends and I were pretending to throw our shoes in the water but at the last minute dropping them behind our backs. Of course I didn't let go of mine and it went sailing into the pond. What a dilemma! They were new shoes, a very rare thing, bought from Pontings at Easter. I retrieved the shoe, but my sister always held the incident over me and threatened to tell my mother if we didn't let her join us at play.

Summer holidays always seemed to be warm and dry. I remember taking some water to drink and a jam sandwich wrapped in newspaper, there was no foil in those days, and with sister and friends exploring Castle Woods or Eltham Park. They were only a mile or two away.

If we had run messages for the lady across the road, then we had earned a penny to pay for a swim at the open air pool in Eltham Park. If the day was hot and sunny then it was always full, and we had to queue for quite a while. I remember the smell of the creosote on the fence as we hopefully shuffled our way to the entrance of the pool. Inside the smell of the very heavily chlorinated water, the

shrieks of delight from the lucky bathers, and scenes of the attendant skimming the leaves from around the edges, never fails to bring back with nostalgia the days of my carefree childhood.

Some days we visited the Tudor Barn at Well Hall which housed a family named Gardners. I think they could have been caretakers but we were never sure. There was a girl and her brothers. We played in the barn itself, and I can see the bales of straw now. We were also encouraged to ride on a very suspect boat like a punt around the moat and scrump apples from the orchard on the side that is now a bowling green and tennis courts. This area was out of bounds and so it was very scary to ten year olds. I know it would have been forbidden by my mother.

One day as we were scampering around the barn, my friend's mother urged us to hurry home as we had a new baby brother. She had just helped to deliver him.

When they started to build on the fields behind Kidbrooke Lane and the top of Westhorne Avenue, we still played, using the scaffold boards as a race track, running and jumping off at the end like a springboard. On one occasion I hit my forehead on a piece of scaffolding and came to grief on the grass, wailing and howling. My friend Joyce behind me was doing the same thing, and thinking she had done exactly the same thing. Afterwards a man from the houses gave each of us a rose. On returning home, I related the story of how I'd bumped my head to my father, expecting sympathy,

but got quite the reverse. His retort would be unprintable. Both my friend and I have laughed at the incident ever since.

*Irene Swanton (Page Estate, Eltham)*

## MAGIC DAYS

**What a wonderful childhood we children enjoyed, coming to a new estate with the country on our doorstep. Everyone said the air was like wine, that is why there was a T.B. hospital about a mile away. Every house had its supply of children and families came from all over London to this 'heaven on earth.'**

I remember trudging up the hill of Burnt Ash Lane in the very cold winter of 1927. It was unforgettable in our first pair of wellingtons. There was thick snow and it was very exciting with the snow covered fields, on either side, for part of the way.

Opposite our road was a field and beyond that an orchard of apples and pears. I remember the hours a friend and I would climb a tree and sit reading our books, munching apples until we felt it was time to go home for tea. We had no watches but took a guess and I never remember being scolded for being late.

We had the most wonderful summers. During the haymaking, after they had just cut the hay, we would play amongst it and throw it around. I don't know what the farmer used to think when he saw his fields the next day.



*Green Lane, St Helier, looking north, July 1926, showing preservation of trees*

We walked for miles to find different woods and streams and there were loads of ponds around where we'd catch tadpoles and newts. There was a little tributary that led into the Ravensbourne, where we'd get our shoes and socks off and paddle. Unfortunately we couldn't swim, it wasn't deep enough. It ran clear through the fields on either side of our lane and provided a constant source of pleasure. We would jump and paddle and look for minnows, frog spawn, baby frogs, or flowers.

We used to climb the trees bordering the stream and jump off the branches to the other side. We children used to queue up to repeat the same exercise time and time again.

Just near the river was an orchard and there must have been a house there at one time because there were the remains of a door step. I remember we also found an old coin nearby, and we thought it was Roman.



*Mr and Mrs Whitewell, John and Phyllis (Rhoden)  
on Martins Hill, Bromley, Kent, 1930*

On either side of Burnt Ash Lane there were two little huts where you could buy tea. Workmen and travellers used to stop there. Inside each hut were benches and the workmen would sit round the room and drink their tea. I remember there was always a lovely smell in there. I think it was a combination of the tea being brewed and the fumes from the oil stoves.

These were the magic days of childhood which came to an end when my mother died and I had to take up my responsibilities.

*Phyllis Rhoden (Downham)*



*Downham hop pickers*

## THE RIVER

It was lovely to be so close to the Thames and watch the tugs, the barges and the sailing boats go past. Most of the children were warned to stay away from the river, but I was fortunate because my parents knew I could swim, so I was allowed to go along there.

Along our patch of river there were several trees, which the boys and the girls used to climb. They all had nicknames like 'The Green Dab Tree', because someone had dabbed a streak of green paint on it. Then there was another tree called 'The Elephant', because there was a branch which used to come down, and it looked very much like an elephant's trunk. These were the children's nicknames though the adults probably thought we were completely mad.

Us kids used to beg, borrow or steal potatoes from our parents. We then used to go along the river, invariably to the same place, bury the potatoes, light a fire and then go swimming. We would be down there all day long, especially in the summer holidays.



In my age group there were about five of us who were good swimmers and we used to swim from the ferry steps, across the Thames and then climb up onto the Chiswick Mall side. We'd stop there a while and then we'd dive back in and come over to our roast potatoes.

Sometimes Mr Boswell, the old policeman, would come along and he'd say, "Are you children alright?" and we'd say, "Yes, we're O.K." He'd then remind us to put out the fire when we had finished.

I spent most of my summer by the Thames but there was one family called the O'Neills, five boys, one girl and Mum and Dad, who'd spend the whole of their summer holidays along the river.

There was another family, who will remain nameless, and they always used to go down to the river's edge and get driftwood. They'd pile it up, in the back garden, and everybody was horrified over that because instead of their garden being all nice and neat and tidy, it was full up with driftwood, which they used to burn on their fires.

*Ken Wills (Castelnau)*

## TROUBLE WITH PADDY

On the other side of the road there were no houses and there was a field and a farm. There were apple trees along the wall there. An Irish farmer used to run the farm and if he caught you up those trees, he used to wait with his whip. You wouldn't come down off that tree until he'd gone. It was a thing of who would last out the longest, Paddy or you up the tree!

*Jim Evans (Roehampton)*

## THE CYCLING CLUB

All my brothers were cyclists and I had a yen to get a bike of my own, so I saved up all my pennies and I bought myself a second hand bike. That, to me, was the start of a new life because cycling eventually got into my blood. I used to travel back and forwards to London, which was twenty miles a day, just going to work. I was fit and I enjoyed it.



*Two children playing by the Silk Stream, Watling 1927*

We used to belong to a club, the Eltham Paragon and we were about sixty strong. We had quite a lot of girls with us. There was quite a lot of social life within the club. We would go out at weekends and travel all over the place. There was a little racing group of about twenty blokes. We used to go racing, twenty-five, fifty miles, and go for runs all over England.

*Richard (Downham)*

## FOOTBALL

There was an old boy who used to run the recreation ground called Charlie. He was a smashing old boy and was there for years. He used to keep the place very clean and I remember he used to tell the children not to drop their sweet papers and we generally did what he asked.

When I got older we used to play football on the grass. Now the story was that we weren't supposed to play on there. Why? God alone knows, but we used to play anyway. Round the outside of the grass was a cinder track and I can remember as a kiddie, in the course of an evening, running round that track about fifty or sixty times. Then, come dusk the recreation ground would close. After I got older I never went into the ground and I believe in the years that went by, the kids began to vandalize it. The council got rid of the keeper and there are no longer any tennis courts in use there either.

*Ken Wills (Castelnau)*



*'The Daggers'. Dagenham Football Club 1930s*

The Castelonians, our estate football team, used to play in the evenings over in the recreation ground. Oh, it was dreadful there when we first moved to the estate because it was all weeds and we'd have to try and cut some of them down before we could practice. I remember there used to be spikes sticking up out of the ground. They were dangerous but we still used to practice. We also used to go down to Barnes Common.

The Castelonians played Barnes Council. Some of their team were dustmen and those dustmen were big. They were huge. I suppose it was from lifting all those dustbins, they used to be made of metal then. So when the Castelonians ever played Barnes Council they would get roughed up!

The Castelonians didn't run for long. One chap got concussion because we used heavy leather footballs in those days. Anyway he headed the ball and poor devil, he died!

*Stanley Breeze (Castelnau)*

## A RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY

My mother was a very strong churchgoer and the first thing she did, when we arrived in St Helier, was to find the nearest church. She enrolled all of us there, into the Sunday School, the Guides and the Brownies, everything she could think of.

We were not allowed to play in the streets on a Sunday but had to stay in and do something reasonably quiet, and naturally at ten and twelve years old we found that very boring and I went to church most of the day.

We'd go to the local church in the morning. Our vicar would talk to everybody and wouldn't just vanish after he had given the sermon. Then we came home for a midday meal. In the afternoon we used to go quite a long way to a Methodist Chapel, where we spent the afternoon in the junior class. On the way home, if we saw a Salvation Army band marching along, often with a portable harmonium, we'd join on at the end and follow them singing and dancing along with all the other kids. We'd arrive home at about five o'clock having had a thoroughly enjoyable day, because Sunday School and Church in those days were far happier and friendlier places than they are today.

There was a girls' club which I joined at the local church and we met one evening a week and sat sewing or knitting while someone read to us. I can remember Dad wasn't too keen for me to go there, as it was High Church and he was Chapel.

Mum enrolled Lily, my sister, and me into the Guides and the Brownies. We were still fairly poor and recovering from the time when my father had been out of work. As a complete Guide uniform was expensive the Guide Captain lent me a uniform which was kept for the use by poorer girls and it had to be handed back when you either left the Guides or had grown out of it. My mother was a marvellous laundress so by the time she had finished with the uniform it looked like new, much to everyone's surprise. Lily's borrowed Brownie uniform also got the same treatment.

We did a great deal with Guides in those days and spent many weekends pushing a lightweight trekking cart, borrowed from the Scouts, round the streets collecting jumble and then helping at the jumble sales, the proceeds going towards camping holidays.

The first time I went on a Guide camp, it was for a long weekend, and although it rained all the time, we spent the whole weekend running about barefoot, so as not to ruin our shoes and I had a marvellous time.



*Dorothy Barton (on the left) with her brother and sister, outside their front door, St Helier 1930s*

There really was quite a good social life in St Helier. It was interesting and the people were friendly.

It was quite different when we moved to the Mottingham Estate in 1937. My brother and sister went to Ravensworth Road school at the lower part of the estate and thus made a lot of friends with children their own age quite quickly, but for people of my age, fifteen, there was nothing at all to do. It seems incredible to me now that these huge estates had been built with absolutely no thought for what people would do in their spare time. An enormous pub was built called the 'King and Queen' and it was supposed to be the social centre. Well it was for the boys. They had concerts and there was also a teenage boys' club. But for the girls there was little else save to join the Brownies and Guides in the surrounding churches.

Our nearest church was a tin hut so my sister and I went to St Andrews Church in Mottingham village.

We would go there every Sunday. I joined the Guides but none of the other girls came from the estate. I don't know whether I was older and at a more sensitive age, but I noticed there was a snobbish attitude towards me there. That was the only outside entertainment I got then. I did make friends with a girl who lived opposite. Sometimes we went out together either to the pictures or walking; otherwise there was nothing else for us to do. Anyway I used to spend a lot of my spare time, on my own, cycling all over Kent.

*Dorothy Barton (St Helier and Mottingham)*

We used to go round to the Congregational church, there was a good vicar then and they had everything going on there. Sport, dancing, Brownies and Guides, everybody used to go. From our bedroom window we could see the lawn at the back of the church. They used to have fairy lights and ballroom dancing there and we would look out and watch the people dancing on the lawn.

All the children went to the church but the parents didn't go. We went in the morning, and in the afternoon we went for a walk, always round the country. On Sundays we used to get the Salvation Army coming and all the children would go down to this green and sing 'H-A-P-P-Y'. Everybody would be singing or whistling. Now if you sing in the street people look at you as though you were mad.

*Florrie Abel and Gladys Hanson (Bellingham)*

### **I NEVER EVEN KNEW THE VICAR'S NAME**

There wasn't much of a religious community when we came to the Roehampton Estate. Back in Pimlico, where we used to live, it was quite different. Although we were in town, our children went to Sunday School. The curate and his sisters used to call and you were like one big happy family. The children belonged to all sorts of things, Cubs and Guides and things like that, but we missed all that when we came to Roehampton because the church didn't seem to be interested. My eldest used to go back up to her Girl Guides in Pimlico and she really never got to know anybody round here. And our new vicar, I never even knew his name!

*Mrs Hibbert (Roehampton)*

### **THE SALVATION ARMY**

There was a Salvation Army Citadel in Bromley Road, built especially for the estate in the mid twenties. The Salvation Army had meetings every week which were always jolly little affairs. They hoped to attract non-believers, or sinners as they were termed.



138 Oakridge Road, Downham. Vera Andrews with her family. Vera is front right

They had a band and I played the euphonium and sometimes the cornet. We used to practise about twice a week. People wanted to listen to us and they got used to seeing us around the estate and at Christmas time we used to play carols. If for some reason we didn't come round people wanted to know why, because it was part of their life then. I remember we used to play under the windows of people that were ill, tunes like 'Onward Christian Soldiers' and 'Under The Flag'. A lot of people think that the Salvation Army were miserable but they weren't, they were lively.

*Arthur and Vera Andrews (Downham)*

### THE DOWNHAM TAVERN

There were quite a lot of things happening on the Downham Estate. At St Barnabas Church Hall they used to run what we called Saturday night hops. I can remember seeing a poster outside on the wall for a 'Flannel Dance', but being a young lad I couldn't understand what a Flannel Dance was because the only flannel I knew was what you washed yourself with. Of course they meant informal attire, such as grey flannel trousers and a sports jacket.

When I got into my teens I went to the large pub, The Downham Tavern. I wasn't fond of beer drinking but I was introduced to the Downham Tavern by going to the dances which they had in a hall. They had a small round box office and it cost sixpence to go into a dance and with the ticket you were allowed to buy a drink. There was an old chap, Mr Annetts, who used to run these dances. The band was up on a big stage and they played from eight to eleven o'clock. Old Time Dancing was on a Monday night and they played waltzes, Canadian barn dances, the London tango and other similar dances. On Tuesday it was modern dancing and it was the same price to get in but you didn't buy any drinks at the bar. There was a waiter and two waitresses who used to run around and serve you. Then on a Sunday night they'd have an entertainment. They'd put seats on the dance floor and have variety acts and turns on the stage. I didn't go to those very often.

*John Edwin Smith (Downham)*

## DOWNHAM'S LARGEST "HOUSE."

HUGE TAVERN TO BE OPENED  
SHORTLY.

TWICE THE SIZE OF THE  
FELLOWSHIP INN.

It is hoped, in December, to open in Downham what is claimed to be the largest public house in the country. It is called the Downham Tavern and has been built by Messrs. Barclay, Perkins and Co., Ltd., the well-known firm of brewers. The tavern is more than twice the size of the Fellowship Inn at Bellingham, and has cost over £10,000.

Situated in Downham-way, in the centre of a rapidly developing portion of the estate, the building has frontages in Moorside-road and Capstone-road. It is of three storeys and has been designed on simple lines in free Georgian style. From a picture which appears elsewhere in this issue it will be seen that it is in harmony with the other buildings on the estate. The elevations are of Crowborough bricks with red dressings, and the roof is of red tiles. The frontage in Downham-way is 100 feet; that in Moorside-road and Capstone-road, 127 feet; and the rear wing 148 feet in length.



*The Downham Tavern 1920s*



*The Fellowship Inn, Bellingham, 1925*



The council built the Downham Tavern and there was something going on every evening. If it wasn't dancing it was wrestling. Parents with children could leave them in this little tea place next to the main building and then go into the concert hall, have a drink and see what was going on.

The hall inside the Tavern was big and there was waiter service. I remember there were these French doors which opened onto a beautiful rose garden. I used to feel like a film star at the Tavern as it really had atmosphere, it was lovely.

There were special concerts on a Saturday evening and I'd book tickets for my mother. For the children they had shows on a Saturday afternoon and at Christmas, pantomimes. Tommy Trinder was even in one.

During the war the Tavern was used for storing food and it has never gone back to what it used to be. It's a shame to see it now. There's a dumpy car park where the lovely Rose Garden used to be and I would love it to change back to what it used to be like.

*Alice Ivilson (Downham)*

## CLIQUEY

With the men coming from places like Bermondsey and Deptford they were used to having their local pub where they were known. Downham had the Tavern but it wasn't a local and some of the men missed the old company that pubs can give. The Downham Tavern was cliquey and you couldn't get to know people like you could in pubs so people got into forming groups. I've lived on Downham all my life and I wish there could have been half a dozen little pubs round the estate.

*George Evans (Downham)*

## THE MARRIAGE BUREAU

When the hall was first built on the Castelnau Estate, it was used as a church. The altar was enclosed with big doors so it wasn't visible when there was a function going on. Then on a Sunday, they'd open these doors and it was just as if you were in church. A curate lived on the estate and he ran the hall.

Once everyone had settled down to living on the estate, a tenants association was started. The association used to run dances and for the older people they had whist drives. In about 1930 my mother started a social which she ran every week and it was immediately very popular. A proper band called the 'Two Bobs' heard about the socials and they spoke to my mother about playing. They came and played for us and were very good. After that we got another band which was four piece, drums, piano, clarinet and saxophone and they were good too.

The socials were a shilling a dance and started at about eight o'clock. My mother used to make coffee, tea and cake and it would finish at about eleven. It didn't take long for it to whizz round that there was a good social where they'd got plenty of girls. Some of the Barnes boys weren't so happy to have the Hammersmith and Fulham boys come over and take their girlfriends away from them, but there was never any bother. Of course it was really like a marriage bureau for the children because the best part of us met our husbands and wives round there.

*Mabel Wallis (Castelnau)*

It went round the boys, "Oi, have you been over Barnes? There's a nice fourpenny hop you know." The boys would say to each other, "Have you got any girlfriends?" And someone would say, "Oh, I've got a nice bird over at Barnes." "Has she got a girlfriend?" "Yeah, I think so." And over you'd come and see. That's how it happened and the Hammersmith boys used to do very well!

*Bert Wallis (Castelnau)*



*Mr and Mrs Wallis' wedding cake,  
Lowther School, Castelnau*

The church hall in Stillingfleet Road always had a little local dance on a Saturday night and of course there would be all the young girls and boys off the estate. Even the chaps in the band came off the estate and it used to be a very nice evening.

My eldest brother met his wife at one of them. She lived in Stillingfleet Road so it was one of the many estate marriages. It was really like a village because my husband and his three brothers also lived in Castelnau and they all married girls from the estate. When my husband and I were courting it was lovely because if you stood on our front door step you were hidden. At that time we had trellis over the front of our house and my dad had honeysuckle trained over it and the lady next door had clematis. It was just as well as there was a lamp post outside!

*Lillian Badger (Castelnau)*

## A DAGENHAM GIRL PIPER

Soon after we moved to Becontree, in 1929, the Rev. J.W. Graves arrived on the scene. As there was no church a large marquee was erected in Osborne Square which was later replaced by Osborne Hall, the Congregational Church. Everyone was interested and the children, being curious, went round to see what was happening. There were all sorts of activities on offer. A boys' and girls' club, Guides, Brownies, Cubs and Scouts. Everybody joined whatever they could.

Mr Graves was very friendly and got on well with young people. He was always around and took an interest in the community. I don't know what made him decide to form a girls' pipe band but in 1930 he chose twelve girls from the Sunday School and without us knowing visited all our parents to ask their permission to form us into a pipe band. He told them it was going to be more than just another club and far more important. He said that it would probably involve a lot of travel and one day we would march in the Lord Mayor's show and down Broadway in New York!



*Pipe Major Peggy Iris of  
The Dagenham Girl Pipers*

After Mr Graves had seen my parents they had a long chat with me and told me what was going on. I think they were probably sceptical but asked me whether I wanted to take part. We didn't even know what bagpipes looked like. I don't think I had ever seen them before. My first reaction was, that it was a bit ridiculous and only Scotsmen played bagpipes but then I thought it was something new to do and I jumped at the idea.

Mr Graves had a lot of faith in us as he mortgaged his insurance policies to buy all the equipment for the band. To begin with we were trained as pipers and were taught Scottish Country and Highland dancing. After a few months four more girls were brought in and trained as drummers, making us into a band of sixteen.

We had to do a lot of practice and it was very hard work but it was more interesting than the other activities in which we were involved. After about three months Mr Graves wanted us to concentrate on the band so he asked us to give up our other hobbies. The Dagenham Girl Pipers was to become my life and nothing outside concerned me very much. In those days young girls didn't have the opportunities they have now.

We used to play all over Britain at lots of church functions, fetes and carnivals, to raise money for different charities. We even helped to raise funds for our own church. In those days show business didn't have a very good name and people didn't think it was acceptable for young girls to appear on the stage in front of an audience. A lot of the congregation disapproved and they didn't think it was right that Mr Graves should encourage his Sunday School girls to go into show business. Although the congregation at Osborne Hall disapproved of us, they were still willing to allow us to do concerts to raise money for them.

Mr Graves believed what he was doing was right and because of the disapproval of the members, he left Osborne Hall. He didn't give up the ministry, he just resigned from that particular branch of the Congregational Church. He often preached there as a guest and at other places where we were appearing.

By 1933 the band was starting to get very popular. As we all came from working class homes, we were expected to get a job when we reached the school leaving age of fourteen, so Mr Graves decided that playing the pipes would be our profession. After we became professional, we weren't associated with any particular church. We were completely self-sufficient and independent. As we were practicing six hours a day we had to have a proper headquarters, so we rented the Drill Hall in Dagenham.

Any girl aged between eleven and twelve who lived in Dagenham could apply to join the band for a trial period of three months, after which she had to pass a test before being accepted full time. Eventually we had sixty to seventy members and we used to split up into four different groups.

I had always wanted to travel and it was my ambition to travel a hundred miles. When I left school our first engagement was in Exeter, Devon,

so my ambition was very soon realised. I remember in 1934 we made our first plane trip. Admittedly it was only to the Isle of Wight but in those days to fly was absolutely fantastic. For most people who came from Dagenham it was undreamed of.

As a group we were very protected and were always very well looked after, even more so than the Dagenham Girl Pipers of today. We didn't think we were anything special but girls playing the pipes was rather unusual. Not many of us had close friends outside the band. When on tour we were not allowed to mix with other people very much and we had a chaperone and a manager. As soon as a show was over we would be herded into the coach and on our way. Spending so much time together and sharing so many experiences, friendships developed inside the band rather than outside.

Every year on the first Saturday in October, the anniversary of the founding of the band, we had a speech day, attended by the mayor and various councillors. After a display by the girls, speeches were made expressing appreciation in the words, "Of the fame the band has won throughout the world and of the honour they have brought to their native town."

My father's attitude about my being in the band was, if it was what I wanted to do, he didn't mind. He knew that we were very well looked after and there was never any question of us being allowed to run wild when we were away from home. My parents must have had a very difficult time then as my father was in and out of work and suffered from ill health, but I was never made aware of it. He never said a lot but he must have been very proud of me. He was unemployed when we made our first appearance at the Royal Albert Hall in 1933. We were taking part in a classical music concert. It wasn't the kind of thing my father enjoyed at all, but in spite of that, he bought a ticket and came to see us. My mother helped in a lot of ways too. She used to make our lace jabots and was very supportive.

If we hadn't gone to live in Dagenham, and if the pipers hadn't appeared on the scene, I would not have had such an interesting life. I would have probably ended up like the majority of the girls I went to school with, working in the local shops or factories, marrying quite young and having a family.

*Peggy Irls (Becontree)*

## THE COMMUNITY CENTRE

We had quite a lot of community centres on the estate but our social life centred round the Sundridge

Park Working Men's Club which was just to the East of the Downham Estate. Not all the families belonged to our club. Many of the men preferred to go out for their drinks at the 'Baring' which is still dispensing beer at Grove Park, SE9.

My mother used to go to a community centre on the estate at Valeswood Road where she belonged to the Co-operative Women's Guild, the Downham Tenants League, the Gramophone Society and the Women's Labour Party. She sometimes used to take me to meetings and I remember they were mostly political. No self-respecting inhabitant of Downham would support anything but the Labour Party then. The candidate of the time was worshipped and I remember the boys singing on the way to school, "Vote, vote, vote for Mr Wilmot, kick old Pownall out the door." That was Sir Assheton Pownall, the Conservative candidate, but in fact he was the successful one, to everybody's amazement.



## DAGENHAM BOYS' AND GIRLS' CLUB ST. GEORGE'S ROAD

DAGENHAM, which has a population of 100,000, of whom, in 1932, 6,400 were boys and girls between the ages of 14 and 17, has at last secured a building as a headquarters for Boys' and Girls' Club work.

The Trustees of the London Parochial Charities have provided the money to build the Club, and we now urgently appeal for help to maintain it. The Club members' fees and their own special efforts will probably realize about £40 a year, but the annual cost of running expenses will be heavy.

Besides the usual Clubs' activities, recreational work will be undertaken in the Clubs in connexion with music, drama, handicrafts, &c., and other purely educational classes will be run in co-operation with the Local Authority.

Capital is needed to develop the land at the back of the Club for a sports ground, to equip the libraries and camp, to provide gym. apparatus and material for the various handicraft groups.

An appeal is made to all those who are interested in the boys and girls of Dagenham to help them to help themselves. No sum of money will be too small in the way of subscriptions or donations, and you will have the satisfaction of knowing you have materially helped to fill a much-needed gap in the lives of the young citizens of Dagenham.

JANET LACEY,  
Clubs Secretary.



*Baring Road tram terminus, Downham 1929. Note 'Vote for Wilmot' slogan on car*

The churches had their various activities such as the Boy's Brigade which was regularly heard parading the streets of Downham with their band. Of course we all knew the comic words of their signature tune:

Here come the Boys Brigade,  
Covered in marmalade,  
A tuppenny ha'penny pill box,  
And half a yard of braid.

*Phyllis Rhoden (Downham)*

### LOCAL BENEFACTOR SIR JOHN LAING

Sir John Laing, the builder, was concerned about the working class. He knew about the Watling estate, and thought, "Well that's an ideal area to evangelise, to get people to know the Lord." So he built the Woodcroft Hall.

When it was being built I remember my father saying, "I don't know what they are building on the corner there. I think it must be a bank, because the walls are so thick."

I remember the scaffolding, it wasn't metal like you get today but just old barrels with sand or soil in and timber upright poles. The scaffolding was put in the barrels and they were all tied together to make the scaffolding all round the building. It was boarded up so we couldn't get on it. There was this pile of sand and I would play with two or three lads, in the sand, with a couple of old tin soldiers. We used to dig out pockets in the sand with our hands, and put the soldiers in there.

*Mr Spicer (Watling)*

On Sunday I went to Woodcroft Hall of the Plymouth Brethren, which was built especially for the estate. Sir John Laing and Roland Webb were in charge of it and they used to run the services. Sir John Laing was a very nice man and I remember he was tall, with greyish hair and a roundish sort of face.

We wasn't made to go to church but were asked by my mother. I went to the breaking of the bread in the morning, bible classes in the afternoon and at half past six, evensong.



*The Duchess of York opening Dagenham Boys and Girls Club, Mottingham*

In the summer the people from the church used to go up to Sir John Laing's house in Mill Hill. That was our Bank Holiday treat. There were swings and see-saws there and they gave you something to eat like sandwiches and orange juice.

*Marjorie Rutty (Watling)*

There were no schools on the Watling Estate for quite some time after it opened in 1926 so it was decided that a Sunday School should be started at the Woodcroft Hall.

Mr Adams was the man responsible for the Sunday School and he was taken aback by the number of children who came to that first Sunday meeting. The response had been overwhelming. This was because most parents were only too glad of the opportunity to get rid of their kids for a couple of hours and know that they weren't in trouble. There also wasn't much competition then for organising children's activities.

Mr Adams quickly got some teachers in and within two or three weeks had got the Sunday School absolutely organised. He divided the hall underneath the church with curtains so that different classes could be held at the same time. He then expanded from the basement to the main hall. A hut was then built outside to cope with the large numbers of children and my father was very pleased with the response. As for the grown-ups, they came to the evening meetings. There were maybe three or four hundred of them and the Woodcroft Hall soon built up its members.

There used to be Sunday School treats for the children and they would go off to somewhere like Burnham Beeches which was really wild country then. Sometimes funny old buses were hired, but lorries from the firm did most of the trips with their wooden benches and canvas covers.

The children also came to my father's house in Mill Hill. Sometimes there were as many as three hundred of them in the garden. They also used the field in front of the garden which was lovely because it had a wood. My father had bought the field in the early 1930s, initially as protection from these terrible builders, but he also had the idea that he might one day build on it himself. He never did and it's still an open space.

*Sir Maurice Laing*

#### A VISIT BY THE PRINCE OF WALES

Back in 1929 we had nowhere to go on the Watling Estate. There were no pubs and the 'Green Man' and 'The Stag', the nearest, were right off the estate.

There was a Quaker called Cyril Harris and it was his idea to start somewhere on the estate where people could go and do things. The council said if we paid for it they would organise the building. So we had a brick collection to raise the money and it was a shilling a brick. We had to get so much money and a notice would be put up to say how far we had got.

The Watling Centre was opened in 1933 by the Prince of Wales. Once it was open the estate got better. All the young people met in the common room on Sunday afternoons. There were armchairs and a beautiful fire. Boxing, cycling and pigeon clubs were organised and there was also a painting class for the children.

*Elizabeth Knight (Watling)*

A community centre was built called the Watling Centre which the then Prince of Wales opened. It was a brick building, a sort of bungalow, and I thought it was wonderful. It's now very dilapidated. I remember the day it opened. There weren't big celebrations but we went to the centre and I thought it was wonderful to see the Prince of Wales.

*Amy Ewell (Watling)*

After the Prince of Wales had opened the centre, someone suggested that he might like to see a thousand people, a lot of them children, in this church hall so he said, "Oh, I want to go and see them." At that time the Prince was a very popular man. It was in the midst of the depression and he was very upset with the state of the country. He was very interested in trying to do what he could to relieve the poverty and visiting the Woodcroft Hall was typical of what he did.

*Sir Maurice Laing*

I remember sitting on the radiator at the back of the hall because it was so crowded. It was the boys and girls getting their prizes for attendance. If you got a full attendance for Sunday School you got a first prize. If you missed two or three weeks then you got a second or third prize. I remember the platform had trestle tables on it full of books. It was great to get a book in those days because we didn't get much at Christmas as we were poor and we had no money. Suddenly they played 'God save the King' on the piano and everyone stood up and the Prince of Wales came up on the platform and said a few words.

*Mr Spicer (Watling)*





*Fancy dress party at end of World War Two. Morston Gardens, Mottingham*

In 1933 I was over at the Woodcroft Hall where we were having our usual January party. I'd just been given a prize and was coming down the steps of the platform when a cheer went up. Well I was so embarrassed, I thought it was for me, but when I looked up, it was for the Prince of Wales.

The Prince was wearing a long frock coat with an astrakhan collar, long pinstriped trousers and he had a bowler. He was with Mr Stanley Baldwin, who was dressed more or less the same. The whole hall was full up so he couldn't have spoken to us all but he did come and shake hands with quite a few of us. I remember Mr Baldwin saying, "Time, your Majesty," and the Prince replying, "Be blown with protocol, the children are enjoying themselves and I'm stopping here for a while!" That is something that has always stopped in my mind.

*Marjorie Ratty (Watling)*



*Children in the countryside near the Downham Estate, 1930*

## CONCLUSION

There's no doubt about it but the people who moved to the Watling Estate changed and we saw it. Many of them had come from the slums where they had been living in appalling conditions. They were decent people who had never had a chance in life. Within ten years of them moving to Watling you could see the benefit especially in their kids who were growing up healthy and getting out into the country. They were going to better schools and getting the chance, if they were clever enough, to go to grammar schools. It was a great and tremendous improvement.

*Sir Maurice Laing*

When the estate houses were first built everyone was very proud and they looked after them. Maybe it was because we had a brand new house, and we did our utmost to keep it spick and span. As for today some of the houses are run down a bit. People aren't taking so much care of them with many of the front gardens being left unattended.

*Peggy Iris (Becontree)*

The Downham houses don't look like they used to. Many have become a real hotchpotch of styles. Some people have put in different windows or doors, used every style under the sun. A lot of people might say that the houses are plain but still I think that the estate was well planned and thought out and the architecture of Downham was really nice.

The problem about people who have been housed in a council estate is that if they had the money to get on, most of them wouldn't stay. I don't live in Downham any more but I have come to really envy the people who do because of their amenities and their community.

*Phyllis Rhoden (Downham)*

We all wanted to come to the Downham estate for various reasons. As our estate gradually widened with more people, we had to move with the times, meeting new people, making young friends, opening up various halls, Christian establishments and things like that. We gradually made our lives here and made the community what it is now.

The war really brought us together as we were all aiming towards one goal, survival. After the war people started to lose that. They were not reliant on each other and they became independent with

some people growing richer and drifting apart from the estate.

Today you don't hear the good points about our communities. I and many others like myself are grateful for what was done and we have done our best to improve ourselves, improve the community and improve things for the younger people. For some it has been a long struggle and for others a pleasure.

*Ron Chattington (Downham)*



*Downham Landgirls 1941*

From cobbled streets, factory chimneys and railway engines belching smoke, the move to open spaces, gardens and a close-knit community of friends to play with, meant life for me in the thirties was 'just like the country'.

*Irene Swanton (Page Estate, Eltham)*

The London County Council Cottage Estates gave people the chance to pull themselves up, and the children from our estate school have all done extremely well. They have had the chance to become solicitors, doctors and bank managers. I think that all people should be given a chance, and I say good luck to anybody who takes that chance. I would recommend anyone to come and live on our estate as it is a very nice place to live, and I would like to see all families brought up in a little house with a garden like ours.

*Mabel Wallis (Castelnau)*

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